NMP

COMICS FEATURE

November No. 7

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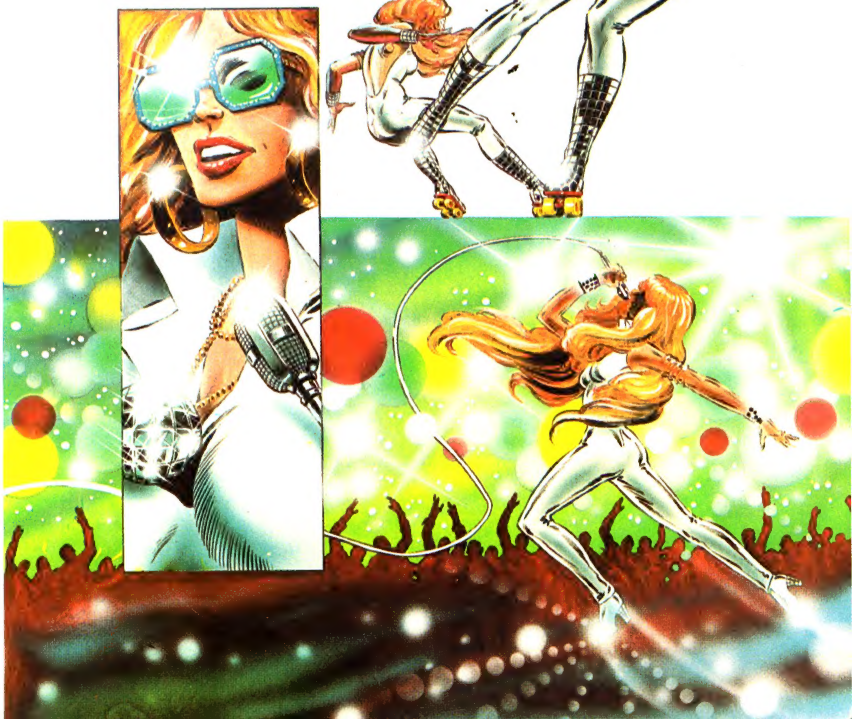
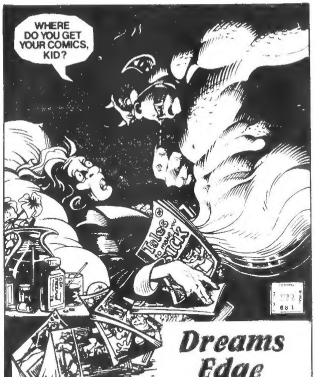
A Talk with ZIPPY's Bill Griffith

Dissecting the DAZZLER!

DETECTIVE hits #500

How SUPERMAN treats his Women!





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OPENING NOTES

Editing a magazine can be a tricky business. One has to constantly strive for a level-headed democratic approach to the magazine's subject of exploration, as well as for the information to achieve the knowledgeability that that approach must necessarily entail. With ***COMICS FEATURE*** (as with any other magazine or fanzine covering comics), that creates a problem:

The problem is that there are, under that definition, very few qualified comics critics whose work we can publish. "Fan" journalism (and I use the term loosely) has gotten a bad name of late in that its reviewers seem to break down into two mutually exclusive groups: devotees of the past comics art achievements which it's now generally acceptable to idolize (Eisner, Herriman, EC, Segar), and who are thus contemptuous of present-day comics; and those whose knowledge of the rich vein of past comics art covers only latter-day super-hero comics—the current dominant development of the form.

Somewhere in between these two groups one would expect to find a large contingent of happy-medium critics—those who know the field's history ***and*** its current state—but it seems that reviewers who can at least begin their journalistic analyses with a comparatively catholic, nonpartisan approach are few and far between. Although I ***personally*** feel that the modern overground comic book is in a particularly fallow period (and have little patience with any extolling of the current "fan-favorite" line as the apogee of the field's development), in the past two years I've also developed a distaste for those who claim to show their love for the comics medium through an unremitting disaffection for what present-day comics actually ***are***. The charge could be made here, I suppose, that I'm embracing mediocrity—a charge which I deny. I prefer to think that it's my duty as an editor and a reviewer to see that comics are judged against the standards that are applicable to them. It's not only unfair to unfavorably compare ***THE SHE-HULK*** to ***THE SPIRIT***, it's plain silly. I continually run into reviews which condemn ***STAR WARS*** because it's not the movie; ***TARZAN*** because it features "boring jungle adventures"; DC Comics because they don't read like Marvel comics; Old Marvel comics because they don't read like present-day Marvel comics, etc., and it's rather disheartening.

Certainly every reviewer carries inside himself (or herself) a set of basic likes and dislikes (read: prejudices) which will cause him to respond to some styles of comics stories and/or storytelling in a more positive manner than he will to others. The distinction to be drawn here is that the wise columnist sees those predilections in himself, and takes steps to minimize any critical myopia that might arise therefrom. And the most reliable method to ***prevent*** the proven pitfalls of prejudicial tunnel-vision is: Knowledge.

No laboratory studies have been performed as yet, but on my own experience I can testify that I know of no surer route to deprogramming a Marvel zombie than to induce him to read some of the many truly excellent ***SUPERMAN*** or ***FLASH*** stories published over the past twenty years. Many devotees of certain characters or genres ***can*** be prompted into experiencing (and usually enjoying) more comics work than they ever thought they would—through being exposed to, say, other creators' work on the same characters, or the same artist's efforts through super-hero, humor, love, and western comic books. What it comes down to is that the more one knows about the comics medium, the more one is likely to enjoy more kinds of comics—and also the more one is likely to appreciate the many, many ***different*** ways in which many ***different*** approaches can still result in a "good" comic.

That's why ***COMICS FEATURE*** insists on a high level of knowledge in its columnists. We're out to present many different aspects of appreciation of comics craft to you in our reviews, interviews, and feature pieces, and to do that ***well***, we have to be familiar with not only what our subject matter ***is***, but why it's ***not*** what it ***isn't***. We're interested in broadening the tastes of the comics audience so we can all appreciate comics more—and better.

I can scarcely recall being so professionally unnerved as when a prominent fanzine editor told me that the reason he didn't like DC Comics was that he didn't read any. (He read three comics per month—the same three, and all were Marvels.) I'd be the last to gainsay the ***consumer's*** right to make sweeping choices on such addle-pated grounds, but the notion that an ***editor*** presumed to oversee a magazine covering the comics field, a magazine likewise presumably informed and instructive, without feeling any duty to monitor that field's output—sickened me, and pretty well undermined whatever credibility I had placed in that person's fanzine.

As ***LoC*** columnist Chuck Huber commented to me about that situation, "I guess that's one of the luxuries of publishing a ***fan***zine: You can dispense with such professional notions as knowledgeability and objectivity." We at ***COMICS FEATURE*** took that as a warning that our ***attitude*** should establish us more as a ***maga***zine about comics (as opposed to a ***fan***zine) than should the nevertheless-also-true difference that we think enough of our columnists to pay them.

Even before I became a comics-commentary magazine editor, I read comics because I liked them. Now that they're a component part of my livelihood I still like them—and now I read them ***all***, plus whatever historical material, related criticism, reprints, etc., I can get my hands on. Sure, it takes time (though not as much as one might think), and no, the comic companies don't send ***FEATURE*** free copies of their latest issues—that's not the point. The point is that ***COMICS FEATURE***'s editorial stance is aimed at people who like comics, who are interested in knowing more about comics, and who would like to be guided to more comics that they would be the better for having read—and it's partially my job to keep them informed. That's why ***my*** keeping informed is an implicit editorial responsibility, and why I'll continue to maintain and augment my knowledge of the field's history and traditions—it's part of the job.

And besides, I like comics. ●

Richard Howell

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A
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A
K
YOU CAN'T PASS UP COMPREHENSIVE ARTICLES ON THE DEATH OF THE ROMANTIC INTEREST IN COMICS MODESTY BLAISE THE MICRONAUTS WOMEN IN TERRY AND THE PIRATES THE SILVER AGE OF COMICS
K
Q
WE PLAY THE GAME RIGHT BY BRINGING YOU NEWS UPDATES AND EXCLUSIVES!!! YOU'LL KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING IN COMICS WHEN IT HAPPENS!!! PLUS OUR CONTINUING FANDOM ZONE SECTION FEATURING FANDOM ORIGINS LISTINGS AND ADVICE
Q
J
WE'LL GIVE YOU ODDS THAT COMICS FEATURE IS YOUR KIND OF MAGAZINE!! REMEMBER, WE HAVE WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR!! WE'RE THE MAGAZINE THAT LIKES COMICS!!! DON'T LOSE THE GAME!!! PLAY THIS WILD CARD AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR WINNING HAND!!!
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HEADLINES

JOHN BYRNE LEAVES *NEW X-MEN*

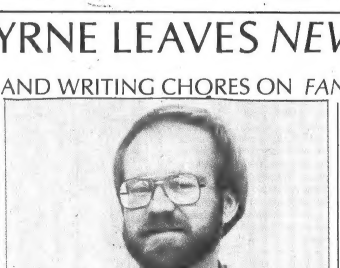
ASSUMES ARE AND WRITING CHORES ON *FANTASTIC FOUR*

John Byrne, penciller and co-plotter of ***THE NEW X-MEN***, will leave that magazine with issue #143 and will instead begin both writing and drawing ***THE FANTASTIC FOUR*** with issue #232.

Byrne explains that "after three years and six hundred pages" of ***THE NEW X-MEN***, "I saw myself growing 'mechanical'" and falling into "a general malaise." He first felt the "malaise" coming on a year ago, but says that the Dark Phoenix storyline inspired him to continue with the new series until the present. Having already been named as the new writer on ***THE FANTASTIC FOUR***, Byrne decided that the time was right to leave ***THE NEW X-MEN*** and that he would begin penciling ***FF*** as well.

Coincidentally, Byrne's first ***FF*** issue, 232, will come out on the nineteenth anniversary of the month he bought his first copy of ***FANTASTIC FOUR***, number 5, which introduced Doctor Doom. Byrne declares himself to be "thrilled and honored" to be doing the comic which he says was and still should be "the world's greatest comic magazine." In his opinion, ***FANTASTIC FOUR*** "deserves to sell the way ***THE X-MEN*** sell." Without merely recycling old plots, Byrne intends to try to create stories that match "all the great stories I've seen before" in the days that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby did ***THE FANTASTIC FOUR***. Byrne wants to combine "the grit" of the first ten issues of ***FF*** with "the power" it achieved between issues #48 and #70.

His first story will bring back



Diablo. Issue #233 centers on the Human Torch's efforts to clear the name of an old high school friend of his who was convicted and executed for murder. Byrne wants the story to show the Torch's sharp intelligence, which he feels other writers have underrated. In issues #234 and #235 Ego, the Living Planet from ***THOR***, hurtles towards Earth, creating havoc there through the force of gravity as he approaches.

Issue #236 will be the twentieth anniversary issue of the series, which may be bigger than an annual, possibly containing fifty or sixty pages of story. Jim Shooter asked Byrne to do the issue as if it was ***"THE FANTASTIC FOUR—THE MOVIE,"*** and Byrne reports that he is trying to do just that. The villains will be Doctor Doom and the Puppet Master, and, according to Byrne, the story will "retell the FF's origin without retelling it" and have "the FF lose their powers without losing them."

In Byrne's eyes Doctor Doom is a character who is "regal, noble and brave." Rather than using him only once every year or two, he wants to bring Doom back "as many times as I feel like," just as Lee and Kirby did in the early ***FF*** issues.

Tentative plans for the future include Mr. Fantastic battling Doctor Octopus, the Inhumans moving permanently to the blue area of the moon, which will then be vacated by the Watcher, and a story with Galactus and the Silver Surfer which begins with the Surfer being freed from his exile on Earth. Byrne will be doing stories with new characters as well.

Alicia will be written out of the book when she is accidentally but seriously injured by the Thing during a battle with a villain. Alicia will not be killed, but the Thing will decide that Alicia will always be in danger as long as they are together, and will reluctantly break off their relationship permanently. Byrne explains that "Alicia by her very existence has diminished the tragic existence of the Thing." Byrne wants to re-emphasize the fact that the Thing is a monster, that people are afraid of him, and that Ben knows they are afraid.

Byrne plans to put his visual stamp on the characters in a number of ways. Reed "will get a lot thinner" and Sue may get her hair cut. Byrne wants to draw Sue in a way that will emphasize that she is, as he sees it, twelve years younger than Reed. Furthermore, from now on whenever a human Ben Grimm is shown transforming into the Thing as he looks today, Ben will be depicted passing through transitional stages corresponding to the somewhat different appearances the Thing had at times in the early history of the series.

Byrne agress that there is a good amount of cliche in the characterizations of the Fantastic Four: aside from the Thing the group has a solemn 1950's movie-style scientist, a rather retiring, housewifely heroine, and a (literally) hot-tempered youth. However, Byrne wants to "reemphasize" these traditional characterizations. He contends that today comics characters are all "butch or macho or hep or cool" and that it is refreshing to have characters like the FF who are examples of what he calls "Joe Ordinary." Although "the characters were cliched in their day," Byrne asserts, "now they can look new and different." It is thus his opinion that the Fantastic Four, due to their traditional characterizations, ironically stand out today as unique compared to the many contemporary superheroes who owe their very existence to the FF's success nearly two decades ago. —P.S.

COCKRUM REJOINS NEW X-MEN STAFF

Dave Cockrum, co-creator (with Len Wein) of the ***NEW X-MEN***, has been assigned to the book again as the regular penciller. His first issue, #145, will begin a three-part story involving virtually all the ***X-men***, new and old, and their attempt to rescue their old foe Arcade from captivity by Dr. Doom. It is uncertain at this time whether or not Terry Austin will continue to ink. According to ***NEW X-MEN*** editor, Louise Jones, "We'd love to keep Terry on the book, but it's his option. You can't force people to stay on books."

Both writer Chris Claremont and editor Jones are pleased with the choice of Cockrum as the new penciller. Claremont has always cited Cockrum as one of the artists he most likes to work with, while Jones has enjoyed working with Cockrum on the ***STAR TREK*** book.

A few comics observers have questioned whether or not Cockrum is capable of maintaining a regular monthly schedule, especially now that Marvel stories are 22 pages long. Citing the fact that Cockrum was "four months" behind schedule at the time of his departure with issue #107 (this was when the ***X-MEN*** was bi-monthly), some have wondered how long Cockrum will be able to handle the work load. Jones responds by pointing out that Cockrum is especially enthusiastic about doing the ***NEW X-MEN*** once again and that "there is not reason why someone of Dave's caliber can't do one book a month."

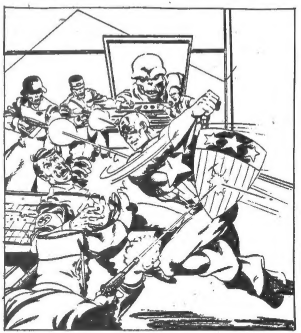
Cockrum will also be co-plotting the ***NEW X-MEN*** in addition to doing the pencils.

At this time it is impossible to tell what effect Cockrum's new assignment will have on his several proposed DC committments. DC editor Len Wein still expects that Cockrum will have the time to handle the art chores on the proposed revival of ***THE BLACKHAWKS***, however, Cockrum's participation in this project will hinge entirely on his ability to handle his ***NEW X-MEN*** assignment.

MILLER ON DR. STRANGE

Frank Miller has been assigned ***DOCTOR STRANGE*** now that Gene Colan is no longer doing the pencils. His interpretation of the good doctor as seen in the latest ***SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL*** has already received quite a bit of attention from the fan press. His first issue of ***DR. STRANGE*** will be #48.

Miller has also just been assigned the writing chores for ***DAREDEVIL***, which he already pencils. Miller will be the second writer/artist presently represented at Marvel, joining John Byrne, writer/artist of the ***FANTASTIC FOUR***.



Splash page from Stern / Byrne's last issue, **CAPTAIN AMERICA #255**

STERN, BYRNE QUIT CAP

Roger Stern and John Byrne have both unexpectedly left ***CAPTAIN AMERICA***. According to editor Jim Salicrup, Byrne left for a variety of reasons, particularly because "he didn't see any reason to stay if Roger wasn't writing the book." Stern claims he will use the time freed by his departure from ***CAPTAIN AMERICA*** to catch up on his other writing assignments.

Issue #255, the special 40th anniversary issue, will be the last Stern-Byrne work. #256 will be a fill-in by Bill Mantlo and Gene Colan. The story will again be set in England (the locale of #254) since the fill-in had been assigned before Stern and Byrne left the book and attempts were being made to maintain the story continuity. #257-58 will be written by Mike Barr and pencilled by Lee Elias. These were originally two 17-page stories filed in inventory, but the suddeness of the former creative staff's departure required their use. Five-page framing devices will be added to bring the stories up to Marvel's new 22-page length. #259 will be the first issue by the as-yet-assigned new creative team.

Salicrup doubts that many of the plots Stern had planned for the book would actually be used. He believes that the new writer, whoever that will be, would prefer to develop his own directions for the strip.

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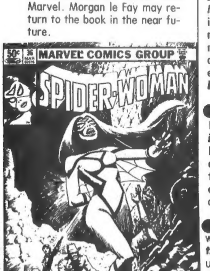
EDITORIAL APOLOGIA: Due to scheduling difficulties, we have thus far not been able to present the ***COMICS FEATURE*** interview with Val Mayerik. It has been delayed but ***will*** appear. In the meantime; we've decided to ***not*** announce it in our this month's "Next Issue" section. Doesn't mean it ***won't*** be in our next issue, though...

MARVEL

● Roger Stern has begun work on the 1982 Marvel calendar, which celebrates Spider-Man's 20th Anniversary. Plans are to showcase Spider-Man's first meetings with various Marvel characters (i.e. with The Hulk, from ***SPIDER-MAN*** #15) and thus feature lots of guest-stars.

● As of October 1 of this year, Marvel writers no longer receive pages of original art for the stories they have worked on.

● Spider-Woman moves from Los Angeles to San Francisco and also encounters some aliens in issue #36 of her new magazine. Issue #37, the first set in San Francisco, introduces the new female Banshee. The new X-Men guest star in issue #38 along with their foes Black Tom and the Juggernaut. In issue #39 Spider-Woman battles the Avengers after she is hired to investigate the disappearance of Carol Danvers a.k.a. Ms. Marvel. Morgan le Fay may return to the book in the near future.



● Rachel, the young red-headed telepath in the "future" sequences in the current ***NEW X-MEN*** storyline, was originally conceived by writer Chris Claremont as Rachel Summers, the daughter of Scott Summers (Cyclops) and Jean Grey (Marvel Girl/Phoenix). Needless to say, these plans had to amended somewhat after Claremont killed Jean Grey, Rachel's "future mother."

Along those same lines, it's now safe to reveal that Frankie Raye, former girlfriend of the Human Torch (and former pen name of inker Frank Giacoia) was going to be revealed as the daughter of Toro Raymond, assistant to the original android Human Torch. Former ***FANTASTIC FOUR*** writer Roy Thomas never did work this revelation into the actual storyline, and present ***FF*** writer John Byrne has elected to not follow up on it.

● Jim Shooter intends to feature one of Marvel's oldest characters, Millie the Model, in an upcoming ***MARVEL SPOTLIGHT*** or ***MARVEL PREMIERE*** Millie, long the title character in several of Marvel's teen comics, has been confined to comic book limbo for nearly a decade. She has made a few cameo appearances in the ***DEFENDERS*** recently.

● Mary Jo Duffy is writing a ***WHAT IF?*** story detailing ***"What if Phoenix had Never Died?"*** Dave Cockrum had been scedulled to draw it, but he was forced to bow out after being reassigned to the "normal" ***NEW X-MEN*** comic.

● Chris Claremont is now the writer for the ***"Daughters of the Dragon"*** adventure scheduled to appear in ***MARVEL PREVIEW*** #25. He replaces Denny O'Neil on the project. The penciller for the story is still scheduled to be Marshall Rogers.

● The hundredth issue of ***MASTER OF KUNG FU*** will be doublesized and will consist of a special story by Doug Moench. The story will be divided into two sections. The first part, drawn by Gene Day, is set in the 1930's and features a Fu Manchu and Nayland Smith story. The second section, drawn by Mike Zeck, features the series' present-day characters.

● ***THE NEW X-MEN*** #144 will be a fill-in by regular writer Chris Claremont and penciller Brent Anderson. The story will feature a confrontation between Cyclops (currently on sabbatical from the X-Men) and the ***MAN-THING***.

● The cover story of ***WHAT IF*** #25 shows what would have happened it Thor had started a civil war in Asgard in anger over Odin's opposition ot his romance with Jane Foster. The Avengers are also featured in the story, which was written by Peter Gillis, drawn by Rich Buckler and inked by Dave Simons. ***WHAT IF*** #26 contains a follow-up story to ***CAPTAIN AMERICA*** #250, entitled ***"What if Captain America Had Been Elected President?"*** Mike W. Barr will write the tale rather than the previously-announced Roger Stern.

● There may be a new ***ORIGINS OF MARVEL COMICS*** trade paperback, but one of a very different sort. This version would recount in comics form how Stan Lee and others came to create the various Marvel characters. At least a few pages from each of the original Marvel series themselves would be included. Stan Lee will probably write the book. Whether or not the book is done may depend on whether Marvel has to get permission to portray the many real people involved in the early days of Marvel in the book, and if so, whether enough of those people will indeed cooperate.

● Paul Gulacy did the covers for both ***MARVEL PREVIEW*** #24, which features Bill Mantlo and Val Mayerik's science-fiction tale, ***"Paradox,"*** and #25, the ***"Women Adventurers"*** issue.

● ***FANTASY MASTERPIECES*** #14, a 52-page reprint of two complete comic issues, was accidentally released with a "50¢" price tag on the cover, instead of the usual "75¢."

●●●

● Correction: The new creative team on Marvel's ***STAR WARS*** comic consists of writer David Michelinie (who takes over with issue #51), penciller Walt Simonson (who begins with issue #49) and inker Tom Palmer. Mike W. Barr scripted #49, and the fiftieth issue will be by Archie Goodwin, Al Williamson and Carlos Garzon (the creative team on Marvel's adaptation of ***The Empire Strikes Back***). ***STAR WARS*** #43 and #44 contain pinups of series characters by various artists including Michael Golden, John Byrne and Bob Wiacek.

DC

●In issue #6 of ***THE NEW TEEN TITANS***, the Titans confront Raven's father Trigon on her home world. They have a showdown with the Fearsome Five the next issue, while issue #8 portrays what is described simply as "a day in the life" of the Titans. An early ***GREEN LANTERN*** villain named the Puppet Master (who predates his Marvel namesake) returns in issue #9. Later, the Titans will be captured and enslaved by the alien Gordanians. Eventually the Titans will begin searching for the killers of the original Doom Patrol, and will encounter the Patrol's old arch-enemies the Brotherhood of Evil. Brotherhood members will include the supposedly deceased Monsieur Mallah and the Brain.

● Len Wein and Roy Thomas will each be writing one of the issues of the three-part ***MADAME XANADU*** mini-series for editor Jack C. Harris. Wein also intends to write ***"Whatever Happened to...?"*** stories for editor Julius Schwartz and ***DC COMICS PRESENTS*** dealing with the Crimson Avenger, the Vigilante and Cave Carson.

● ***CAPTAIN STRONG***, the doppelganger refugee of ***THUMBLE THEATER*** will shortly reappear in ***SUPERMAN*** (although probably too soon to take advantage of publicity for the ***POPEYE*** movie).

● ***THE FLASH*** #300 will be a 48 page, no-advertisements Dollar Comic.

● ***Wonder Woman*** will soon come face-to-face with Kobra, the power behind the New Cheetah. After that, there will be a story co-starring Jack Kirby's 1972 creation Etrigan, the Demon. The Huntress will face a new villain named Lionmane.

● Good news for Earth-2 fans: On the first issue featuring the ***"Huntress"*** back-up feature (#271), ***WONDER WOMAN*** sold at "the top of the line." Editor Len Wein is not sure whether the sales upsurge (which began several months earlier) is due to the Huntress, or to the "Return to the Past" storyline then running in ***WW's*** feature. A series of experimental covers are planned to try and determine the Huntress' drawing power.

● ***DC COMICS PRESENTS*** features Superman and Captain Marvel in issue #33, and Superman and the Shazam (Marvel) Family in the following issue. This two-part story was plotted by Gerry Conway, scripted by Roy Thomas, and pencilled by Rich Buckler. The first part will be 17 pages long and the issue will conclude with a ***"Whatever Happened To...?*** featuring Star Hawkins of ***STRANGE ADVENTURES*** AND WRITTEN by Mike Tiefenbacher. DCP#34 will be a full-length, 25-page issue and will include an unofficial ***"Whatever Happened To...?"*** within the main story as it spotlights the return of ***Hoppy the Marvel Bunny!!!***

● Warner Brothers has obtained the distribution rights to the forthcoming ***Batman*** movie.

● Bob Rozakis is writing a new backup series for ***Superman*** called ***The In-Between Years***. It covers Superman's days at Metropolis University and elsewhere between the time he left Smallville and the time he started work at the Daily Planet.

● Jim Starlin drew a cover for ***Detective*** 503 featuring Batman, Robin and Batgirl and Gerry Conway has written a story based upon it for that issue.

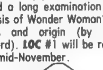
● ***Blackhawk*** will return as a regular backup series in ***Unknown Soldier*** beginning with issue 254. Marv Wolfman will be its writer and Dave Cockrum is tentatively set as penciller. The series will be set in the 1940s. Beginning in the same issue is a three-part ***Captain Fear*** backup series with art by Walt Simonson and script by David Michelinie.

● Paul Levitz and Starlin have done a ***DC Comics Presents*** tale pairing Superman with the most recent version of Starman, which will conclude the latter's saga from ***Adventure Comics***. Future issues will also see Superman teaming up with Plastic Man and the Flash.

● ***CORRECTIONS AND APOLOGIA***: Last issue, between our rushed deadlines and some jumbled notes, we credited several upcoming stories to Len Wein that he did not write. These include ***THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD*** featuring Batman and Scalphunter, the ***DC COMICS PRESENTS*** with Superman and Robin, (both written by Gerry Conway) and the ***JONAH HEX*** with Hex in a wheelchair (by regular ***HEX*** scribe Michael Fleischer). Also, the ***GREEN LANTERN*** stories to be dialogued by Roy Thomas are plotted by ***Marv Wolfman***, not Wein. Profuse apologies are hereby offered to all concerned (including you readers), along with a promise to eliminate such inaccuracy in the future.

GENERAL

●***LoC* #1**, one of the NMP commentary line, will contain 64 pages of essays and critiques, including, among other articles: ***"When is a Hobby Not a Hobby?"*** (by Don and Maggie Thompson); ***"The Creative Community Boondoggy"*** (by Chuck Huber); ***"When Titans Clash—They Really Do!"*** (by Kurt Busiek); "Bravo for ***BRAVO***" (by Richard Howell); ***"Why Women Don't Read Comic Books"*** (by Carol Kalish); ***"The Rape of Ms. Marvel"*** (by Carol Strickland); and a long examination of the basis of Wonder Woman's powers and origin (by Murray Ward). ***LOC* #1** will be released in mid-November.



●Contrary to rumors, Ramona Fradon, long-time DC artist, has indeed taken over the art chores on ***BRENDA STARR***. Dale Messick, the creator of the long-running title, will continue to provide the story and dialogue as well as oversee the artwork.

Fradon intends to integrate the decorative aspects of Messick's art style, long a trade mark of the series, into her own work. She believes that the casual reader will probably not notice the change-over in artists.

●***RBCC, FANTASTIC EXPLOITS,*** and ***ENTERPRISE INCIDENTS*** have all been sold to New Media Publishing. Former publisher James Van Hise will remain the editor and packager of all three magazines. NMP publisher Hal Schuster explained that he believed the three Van Hise magazines will add "depth" to the burgeoning line of NMP commentary magazines.

Current plans call for all three magazines to appear on quarterly schedules. All subscriptions will be honored in full by the new owners. No radical editorial changes are expected, although ***RBCC*** will change its name back to ***ROCKET'S BLAST-COMICOLLECTOR***.

●Desperado-Eastern reports that a new issue of Richard Howell's alternative comic book ***PORTIA PRINZ OF THE GLAMAZONS*** will be released this December. The issue will be Vol. 2, #1, and will contain a mixture of new and reprint material, including the first chapter of the five-part comic novel ***"Glamazon's Burden."*** The improved packaging will include two slick color covers, additional story pages, and a new introduction by Richard & Wendy Pini.

●Richard Howell and Carol Kalish, founding editors of ***CHAPTERS***, have left the employ of that magazine.

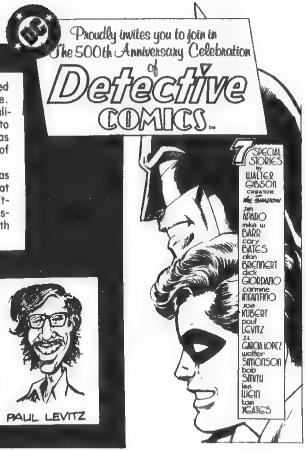
Portia Prinz
of the Glamazons
SO, YOU CLAIM YOU'VE SEEN IT ALL IN COMICS — THAT YOU'D LOVE TO READ SOMETHING MORE SOPHISTICATED? — THAT YOU'RE A MATURE, INTELLIGENT, DISCRIMINATING READER??
I PROVE IT!
WELL, MAC—

●***FANTACO*** has announced that ***ZANY* #1**, contrary to reports elsewhere, will not be released this year. It is currently scheduled for an early 1981 release. It will contain all-new material by the popular satirist/critic Fred Hembeck. The postponement of ***ZANY*** is due to the decision to instead release ***BAN, HEMBECK!***, a similar collection but with a somewhat seasonal content, in time for Christmas 1980.

●The new ***LONE RANGER*** comic strip written by Cary Bates will be drawn by long-time Lone Ranger fan Gil Kane, and not by Russ Heath (as reported elsewhere). It will be daily and Sunday, and appear in worldwide syndication through the New York Times Syndicate. It should start "sometime around February."

The first story will concern the appearance of a woman from the Lone Ranger's past, back when he was John Reid. It will not retell the origin, although that story might follow shortly. Of the Lone Ranger cast, both his nephew, Dan Reid, and Tonto will appear, although the former will not be introduced immediately. Classic villain Butch Cavendish will be a recurring, though not constant, antagonist.

BRENDA STARR
BRENDA, YOU PRINT GET THE MESSAGE THAT I'M GIVING YOU AS MUCH TIME OFF AS YOU WANT?
FLASH
YES, I DID, BOSS.
I'M HERE BECAUSE I CAN'T STAY HOME AND DO NOTHING. I'D GO OUT OF MY MIND.
JUST GIVE ME AN ASSIGNMENT— THE TOUGHER THE BETTER



DETECTIVE COMICS, the magazine from which DC Comics derived its name, will reach issue #500 with its cover-dated March release. To celebrate, an 80-page, square-bound collection of new, top-quality material will appear under its covers. *Editor Paul Levitz refers to the package as his "creative swan song as an editor," inasmuch as he is soon leaving his editorial position to become DC's Manager of Business Affairs.

Levitz refers to the high quality of ***DETECTIVE #500***'s quality as being a "cumulative effect of the people. You tell one guy that you've got Kubert, Giordano, Lopez, Aparo, and Infantino all excited, and he gets excited," leading to a better product. Levitz discussed the theories under which ***DETECTIVE #500*** was prepared with ***COMICS FEATURE*** reporters:

LEVITZ: I would like this ***DETECTIVE*** to sell not from the point of view that DC should have made billions of dollars off publishing this issue of ***DETECTIVE*** comics. It ain't going to happen. But if you see that something you set out to do is something special, it gets the responsiveness—more people being interested. They're going out—they'll be looking for it. The feedback back from the wholesalers and the direct sales people and everything up and down the line. It starts saying more that quality can count. One of the long-time problems with this business is that although you can have very successful, very good books, you can also have ***GHOSTS*** or ***GHOST RIDER*** or whatever out there maintaining a viable commercial existence with material of limited quality. It would be nice to see that something really good can sell much better than something that's just...printable.

And I'd like to see the company encouraged to do things like this. I'd like to see the business encouraged to do this. And that applies to Marvel, also. It's been nice that in the last few years the fans have supported special issues in general. 300th issues, special issues bith here and at Marvel...

CF: ...the miniseries...

LEVITZ: The miniseries...That's encouragement towards quality. When you look at comic sales in the early and mid '70's there was a flatness to them. Not that sales weren't rising year after year... or anything but a bad book and a good book weren't selling a hell of a lot differently. If you look further back...into the '60's...there's a tremendous difference. The ***JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA***'s first issue sold ***30 points better*** than the line did that month. you don't have that today. It just simply doesn't happen... Particularly not compared to the size print runs we were dealing with in those days. I would like to think that the JLA sold that well as a measure of creativity and worth. It was probably one of the better comics being done in its time. And if you can go back to a universe where good books sell on awful lot better than okay books, it's much easier to have motivation to put out good books. And to clear okay books off the scedule to make room. No matter what, you can only put out so many comic books whether you're DC or MARVEL. At some point you reach physical exhaustion. And if a book like ***GHOST RIDER*** or ***GHOSTS*** is selling well enough to maintain its position on the schedule, it'll stay there unless you're given some reason to be-

Art by Simonson
plot by Snoopy

lieve that doing something vastly more creatively different will do a lot better. There's no question that one of the nice things about the whole evolution of direct sales and fandom as an identifiable commercial force is that frankly I can tell you that this book ***will sell*** to a fan audience. Without looking at it, I can show you not the cover but just the list of names on the cover and you could give me a fair estimate of how it will fare against the ***NEW X-MEN*** or whatever else is the current "fan icon" these days. I can't do that for the general public.

CF: That also puts the definition of what fans like as kind of a universal.

LEVITZ: Which isn't true either, but is more true than for the buying public.

CF: There is a real difference between what appeals to the spontaneous buyers and what the fans pick up?

LEVITZ: Yes. We know that ***bad*** stories ***don't*** sell. If the stories don't make sense, if you can't tell what's going on in the artwork, the book won't sell. It won't please anybody. But I know that certain people's work can be trusted as a sort of brand item. Joe Kubert's art is pretty generally specifically this.

CF: You've told us that ***DETECTIVE #500*** is both "unique and not particularly experimental." Could you explain that further?

LEVITZ: Sure. One of the nicest things about these books is that there's absolutely nothing ground-breaking about it. None of the artists here are using anything that you might call avant-garde or revolutionary modern technique. There's not a hell of a lot of breaking out of panels. Nobody's doing anything vastly different from what they were doing ten or fifteen years ago.

There's nothing in here that's startling! Just ***good old-fashioned comic books*** done ***really well***. And I think that that's a very valuable thing for us to have around—simply to be able to hand it to somebody and say "Here, you don't need to spend your energy learning how to do tricks. It's not colored holes that make a story brilliant. It's not whether you can tell a story on pages that go sideways, or have three parallel stories running in columns. It's ***are they good stories?*** Are they doing ***artwork*** that ***tells*** the good story? So if you look at the Joe Kubert story you don't need to know the words to tell what's going on there. Similarly Carmine's. (Less so with the others, because those two are the major storytellers in the book.) The lead script (Alan Brennert's) is a first script. It's the best first script we've ever bought. It's probably the best story we'll publish all year, for my money. Admittedly he's written TV, he's written novels. He's not an amateur. But it's

HE LOOKS SO DYNAMIC, DOESN'T HE, THOMAS?
TAKE OFF THE COWL, BRUCE... LET YOUR MOTHER AND I HAVE A GOOD LOOK AT YOU!
-SIGHS- MOOM... DAD...
© 1980 DC Comics, Inc.

AND SO...
THERE, KATAR...
ACCORDING TO THE ABSORBASCON, ANNA ERDE IS ON THAT S.AMERR. LEAVING FOR EUROPE!
I'M OFFICE NOT SURE I SHOULD'VE GONE ALONG WITH YOUR SNOOPY-CUT SHAYERA...

Above: Batman becomes Dead Batman.

Below: A gorgeous Joe Kubert Hawkman (and Shiera! Hubba Hubba!)

© 1980 DC Comics, Inc
--EVEN IN LOCK-PICKING!
OBVIOUSLY, THE LADY OF THE CABIN ISN'T HERE! SHOULD WE WAIT...OR SHOULD WE SNOOP?
NO NEED TO WAIT, SHAYERA... I ALREADY KNOW SHE'S INNOCENT!
WHAT?

the first time he's used this medium and he's done it as well as any of us who've been doing it for 10, 20, 30 years.

It's nice to be able to show people. It means that you don't have to say, "Well, we simply can't get this type of work out of a guy because he hasn't been doing it for years." I think that's true throughout the whole book. There's a lot of commitment from people.

CF: Will Alan do more work?

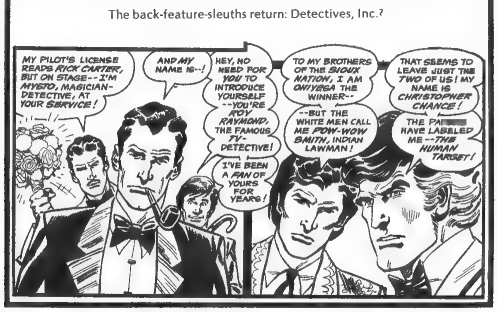
LEVITZ: Well, he might do an occasional story for the fun of it. But remember he makes more in one week, no I'm sorry make that two days of story-editing TV than he did for this whole job, which he probably spent three or four weeks time on—spread out over a period of months. I mean a certain amount of fun you can expect a guy like that to have—beyond a certain point, forget it! Similarly Joe Kubert. He can't afford to work on comic books. He's got a school to run and does animation and an awful lot more projects that are much more profitable. But the fun of it, he can come back to it. Steranko has expressed regret that I didn't ask him to illustrate the Gibson story. (Which was a stupidity on my part given their old friendship.) He said that he would have liked to have done that. This is just a nice book to be in.

The opportunity this has to succeed in my mind is not only based on its intrinsic worth but also that people will know about it. So the push on this book started three or four months earlier than ordinary lead-time would call for. And I've spent a good amount of energy pounding fanzine editors on the heads, buttonholing them and saying: "Hey, this is not a case where we took the same guys who did the preceeding 499 issues, gave them a few more pages, and told them to do the definitive battle between the ***Batman*** and ***Joker.*** We set out to do something very different from what we normally do. Take a look and tell the people so they can support it."

This book isn't a present from DC the corporate entity. 'Cause it's not that DC did anything enormous. It's a present from what really is DC—which is the sum total of the people. An awful lot of the major creative people either at DC or who have done work for DC over the years sat down and did something for the people who read comics. They had fun doing it. But the end of the thing really says what we think it's all about. There'll be a little thank-you card there to the readers, tying in with the invitation at the beginning. It's our party, please come, have fun.●

MEANWHILE, AT A FAMILIAR SUBURBAN MANOR HOUSE OUTSIDE GOTHAM...
NO! I DON'T WANT IT TAKE IT BACK!
YOUR MOTHER WENT TO A LOT OF TROUBLE TO GET THAT, BRUCE! I SWEAR, I'VE HALF A MIND TO--
THOMAS, NO! IT'S JUST A PHASE HE'S GOING THROUGH!
OH, I SUPPOSE...
DEAR LORD... IT'S AS IF THEY'VE COME ALIVE AGAIN! AS IF I COULD... REACH OUT AND TOUCH THEM AGAIN...
FATHER... MOTHER... I SWEAR BY ALL THAT'S DEAR TO ME... I WON'T LET YOU DIE AGAIN!
© 1980 DC Comics, Inc.

Brennert and Dick Giordano's emotional **BATMAN** effort. "Best story... all year"


The back-feature-sleuths return: Detectives, Inc.?
MY PILOT'S LICENSE READS JACK CARTER, BUT ON STAGE--I'M MYSTO, MAGICIAN-DETECTIVE, AT YOUR SERVICE!
AND MY NAME IS--!
HEY, NO NEED FOR YOU TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF --YOU'RE RAYMOND, THE FAMOUS TV-DETECTIVE!
I'VE BEEN A FAN OF YOURS FOR YEARS!
TO MY BROTHERS OF THE SIOUX NATION, I AM OWYEGA THE WINNER--
--BUT THE WHITE MEN CALL ME POW-WOW SMITH, INDIAN LAWMAN!
THAT SEEMS TO LEAVE JUST THE TWO OF US! MY NAME IS CHRISTOPHER CHANCE!
THE PAPERS HAVE LABELLED ME --THE HUMAN TARSERT!
© 1980 DC Comics, Inc.

Dissecting THE DAZZLER!

...AND THE GRIM ALLEY IS SUDDENLY AGLOW WITH A DAZZLING DISPLAY OF LIGHT AND COLOR...
FUN TIME'S OVER, TURKEYS! YOU WANT A HASSLE?
THEN, LET'S GO FOR IT!
PIDZ
©80 Marvel Comics Group

***THE DAZZLER* comic book, originally scheduled to be issued as part of a merchandising tie-in between Marvel Comics and Casablanca Records, will, when it appears in early December, be a solo Marvel project.**

The collaboration with Casablanca caused many development difficulties in the dazzler concept, leading Marvel to cancel the book "five or six times" previous to the publication of its first issue (a possible record). Although over the past year, Marvel had begun to guest-star The Dazzler in various targetted-circulation titles in their own comics line, the corporate vacillation at Casablanca over the character's future caused several significant variations of powers and personality between her various depictions. At the time, The Dazzler was guest-starring in SPIDER-MAN, for example (#203), Spidey's then-scripter Marv Wolfman called DAZZLER-writer Tom DeFalco to ascertain the nature of The Dazzler's powers. "At that time," says DeFalco, "I had gotten three different power suggestions from Casablanca. I had to tell Marv, 'Marv, I can't tell you! I told him what the three powers were...' "

When Casablanca's internal metamorphoses prompted their withdrawal from the project, Marvel was left with a much-publicized new character due to debut, and 34 pages of story material for her which was prepared with the Casablanca guidelines in mind.

Despite the many difficulties associated with the comic's release, and regardless of its critical reception, *THE DAZZLER* #1 is an unqualified sales success. The first comic published by a major company to be distributed solely through the comics specialty shops, the book has already exceeded the 400,000-copy circulation mark. Since this figure represents the actual number of copies purchased by comics stores (and in most cases those copies have already been paid for in advance), Marvel has already been guaranteed a substantial profit on the first issue.

Mike Friedrich, Marvel's direct sales manager, believes that this very successful marketing approach to *THE DAZZLER* #1 reaffirms the growing importance of the direct sales/fan shop market in comic sales.

***THE DAZZLER* #2 will be released both to direct sales shops and to newsstands. Editor Louise Jones believes that the restriction of the first issue to the specialty shops shouldn't undermine the book's newsstand attraction. Just to make sure, though, announcements will probably be inserted into the second issue which will advise readers where they can order a copy of issue #1 if no comic specialty store is in their area.**

The following interview is an after-the-fact overview of how *THE DAZZLER*#1 came to be. It was conducted in September 1980. Present were the current writer/editor team on *THE DAZZLER*, Tom DeFalco and Louise Jones. The interview was conducted by *COMICS FEATURE* editors Richard Howell and Carol Kalish, with help from Roger Stern. It was transcribed and edited by Howell and Kalish.

CF: We've been hearing all sorts of rumors about the Dazzler's origin. We've heard that she was some kind of creation of Casablanca records and kind of a creation of Marvel's...

LJ: Casablanca had nothing to do with her creation at all. What happened was that they came to us and said "How about making us a singer?" I believe that Jim Shooter, Roger Stern, Alice Donerfeld, Milgrom, Tom Defalco, Dickie McKenzie, and John Romita, Jr....

RS: Dickie McKenzie threw in a few ideas here and there. Somewhere I have the original synopsis of the character and what she did. Her original power was that she made people tell the truth.

CF: In a disco setting? Horrors!

[Laughter]

RS: I have to shamefacedly admit to coming up with the name for the character. When we originally had her making people tell the truth we didn't have a name for her. So we said that this isn't really a great power because she wasn't supposed to be strictly a superhero. We were trying to tie her into all sparkle and flash of the music business. We were just throwing ideas around and names back and forth, and we were at some restaurant and I said "How about the 'Dazzler'?" So we wrote that down and ended up going with it.

LJ: I think its a nice name.

involved they had decided not to do anything called ***DISCO QUEEN***, but they still wanted to do something in relation to what was then the Disco scene. They had come up with a name—she was called Dazzler—and they had some vague ideas of what her powers should be. That's basically what they had.

Issue #1, Jim had plotted it—Dickie also—we plotted issue #1 together. This is before this issue was born (the current issue of Dazzler #1).

LJ: I didn't know there had been one before this issue. You learn something every day.

TD: Oh, yeah. There had been a completely different issue #1. It was a standard super-hero issue with standard definitions of her character and how her powers worked. We put together a standard superhero origin: she gets her powers, she does typical super deeds, and at the end she's on her way to start her career. This plot was then submitted to Casablanca. The reason Marvel was doing something in the Disco field was because Casablanca had evidenced interest in it.

CF: Did Casablanca's interest preceed ***DISCO QUEEN*** or was it the spark for ***THE DAZZLER?***

TD: Casablanca's interest was before ***DISCO QUEEN***.

LJ: Casablanca just came to Marvel and said, "Hey, you make a singer

" JIM ANNOUNCED THAT MARVEL WAS GOING TO BRING OUT A NEW CHARACTER...CALLED THE DISCO QUEEN.!! NOBODY WANTED TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT."

Two early sketches of **THE DAZZLER** before her costume stabilized. Drawings by John Buscema.

RS: Yeah, it's a great name. It tells what she does right off which is always nice.

CF: When did you (to DeFalco) come into the Dazzler project?

TD: I came into the process someway around June of 1979. I can tell that because I got paid for it then and I checked my receipts. There was a writer's meeting and at that meeting Jim announced that Marvel was going to bring out a new character—a new type of book called ***THE DISCO QUEEN***. Nobody wanted to have anything to do with it. Very simply nobody wanted to have anything to do with it. Except for one girl who worked here at the time: Dickie McKenzie. She was interested in it. At the time they were talking about something along the lines of an ***ARCHIE*** character or something like that. So I went to Dickie and said if you do it and you need any help, I'll help you. [Tom DeFalco's offer was inspired by the fact that he alone of the writers involved in the book had any experience working with ***ARCHIE*** comics. Tom had been an Archie writer for several years before he came to Marvel] A couple weeks later I was called down to Marvel and they said, "We hear you want to work on our new character." And I said, "No." And they said, "Yes, you do!." And at last I started talking to Jim about it. By the time I had started to get and we'll create someone to take on the persona. It was a wonderful tie-in. And then Casablanca...(LJ puts thumbs down).

TD: So anyway, we worked out a plot, Jim Shooter and I. Jim was editor-in-chief so it was accepted by Marvel. The plot went over to Casablanca. Casablanca said, no, this is nothing like what we want. So they bounced it back.

CF: Did they say what they did want?

TD: They had about ten or twelve different things that they wanted. I'm a professional commercial writer and I can put in anything that a customer wants. Especially if they were willing to pay for it over and over again. So we went and did everything that they wanted. Some of it was pretty silly, but we did it just the way they wanted.

CF: Anything in particular?

TD: At this point I can't remember the silly things but it didn't really matter because the second time they saw it they decided again that it wasn't really what they wanted. So I think around the third or the fourth time we finally got what they wanted, more or less, and we had essentially the story that will appear in Dazzler #1 and #2. They wanted some strange things done with the artwork. Take the ***X-MEN*** pages which basically come across like bubble gum cards. They said

Good question, Cyke. When this panel appears in **DAZZLER #1**, you won't be in it!

the story was fine and basically everything was fine—they wanted the ***F.F.***, ***THE NEW X-MEN***, ***SPIDER-MAN***, ***THE HULK***, and a bunch of other characters thrown in.

CF: All in one issue?

TD: Yes. By this time we had already decided not to publish it as a regular comic book. We were going to bring it out as a Super-Special. So we had like 34 superheroes in the book?? I don't remember what it was, some outrageous number, and we were going to publish a 34-page book. They liked all the introductory scenes where all the characters were introduced, but they didn't see any need for a fight scene. Originally there was just a one page fight scene. Didn't you realize that in issue #2 there was just a one page fight scene (to LJ)?

LJ: Oh, I realized that, we changed it..

TD: J.R. made it work. You almost wouldn't notice it. J.R. really worked on this project, and when he's good, he's fabulous—when he's having an off-day, he's merely brilliant—still they wanted so much introductory stuff in the space allotted, especially the way they wanted it written...

LJ: That's actually what I thought happened...that they wanted so much introductory stuff that there wasn't room for a fight scene.

TD: They wanted so much introductory stuff that we had a 34-page story with a one page fight scene. It was a weird story with these 34 characters fighting the Enchantress in one page.

CF: 34 characters could probably squash her just by sitting on her.

TD: Actually the Enchantress in the Marvel universe is probably one of the most powerful characters around.

CF: That's why she doesn't get used very much.

LJ: Not if it takes 34 heroes to beat her...

TD: Actually though those 34 superheroes would have lost in a real battle. The only Marvel character who could face the Enchantress and survive is Thor.

CF: What about Dr. Strange?

TD: You're talking about a god and a mortal. So anyway, we had a 34-page book which was written as a one-part 34-page story. At this time Casablanca started to have their corporate problems. We didn't realize it was Casablanca corporate problems until later on. What we found out was that we had the artwork and we had the story written when Casablanca suddenly said it wasn't anything they wanted. They didn't know if they could come up with the money for anything like that. We were very surprised at that because they had read the first 25 pages of the script and said "great" and they had looked at the artwork and said "fabulous" and suddenly with the last ten pages they said that we'd totally missed the concept. It was such a reverse that nobody knew what to make out of it. So Marvel had the book and didn't know what they were going to do. They thought maybe they would publish it as a regular comic book anyway. I think this is where you came in (turns to LJ)...

LJ: Is it?

TD: They had cancelled the book two or three times, put it on the scedule and then cancelled it...

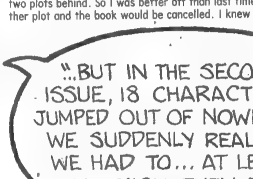
LJ: It had gone from Super Special to Black and White to a regular comic...It was very confusing.

TD: The last time it was scheduled, Marvel stories were only 17 pages each and what they did was they had a 34-page story and they chopped it in half. It made for a very interesting story. The first half you have all these people beautifully introduced, and I do mean beautifully introduced. Two or three pages for ***THE NEW X-MEN***, pages for the ***AVENGERS***...I mean this is classic introduction. But in the second issue on one page 18 characters jumped out of nowhere at a disco. We suddenly realized that we had to introduce these characters or at least mention them by name...

LJ: So later on when they showed up in the fight scene those rare, rare people who don't follow the Marvel Universe would at least know they were super-heroes.

TD: So we had like two panels which were almost solid copy. It was either doing "Iron-Man-who-has-solar-powered-armor" or to do the ***DICK TRACY*** thing and just have Iron Man with an arrow pointing to him. In an earlier version we had decided to do the ***TRACY*** bit and then decided that that was too stupid. Luckily the book was cancelled again.

I think the book has been cancelled six times since I've been on it. What would happen is they would call me up and tell me, "You're three plots behind! Where are the plots?" So I'd turn in a plot and then the book would be cancelled. Two weeks after that they'd called me up again and tell me the book was back on the schedule and I was two plots behind. So I was better off than last time. I'd turn in another plot and the book would be cancelled. I knew that every time I



turned in a plot it would be cancelled. At one point I figured I could turn in the same old plots because no one was going to read them anyway.

CF: Sounds like a very aggravating process.

LJ: It was very dissapointing.

TD: Well, I still don't believe that its going to be published. I swore that I would not believe that it was going to be published until I saw it on the newsstands. Now I hear it's not going to even appear on the newsstands, so I really don't believe it's going to be published.

It was very frustrating for me but I think it was even worse for J.R. He had actually designed the character and put a lot of heart and soul into it. He was really into the Disco scene, really for the character—he takes his music seriously. He wanted to do a character that was not your standard Marvel long underwear super-hero. Now I think we have a character who is ***not*** your standard Marvel Super-hero. But if you like standard super-hero characters you're going to like this one. If you like real people, you'll like her. If you like humor, we've got that, too. We've got everything.

CF: Is the Disco consciousness mainly a reflection of JR's interest? Did you have to go out to Discos to research the book or are you approaching it from a different angle?

TD: We are definitely approaching it from a different angle...I don't think the word Disco is really mentioned in the first book.

She sings in a Disco but she is not a "Disco Singer." She is a singer. Someone who has a desire to be a singer. I know someone who is going through what she is going through as a professional singer and I'm basing a lot of the pain and the feeling on her experiences...We decided very early on not to make it a real Disco book because around the time of the fifth cancellation we figured that by the time the book came out Disco would be dead.

LJ: Music styles come and go, too. No music style is always there, really, and a good singer can move through different styles of music...

CF: Will she be doing that? Will she always be a representative of the musical trends that are currently in vogue?

TD: It's not going to be that specific.

She will always represent someone who is struggling for a dream. In her case her dream is music. I hope that the kids who want to be writers, or movie makers, or anything, can identify with that dream, too. Anyone who had a dream to reach greatness...

LJ: Remember that no matter how good she gets...it's like climbing a mountain—the higher you get the farther you can see. No matter how good she gets she can see that there's better.

TD: She'll always be struggling. Even after you get to the top, you always are struggling to polish your craft.

CF: It sounds almost as if you're doing a superhero ***MARY PERKINS... ON STAGE.***

TD: It's not going to be a love comic or anything like that...

CF: But you are using her career as a motivating force?

LJ: Actually her career gets in the way...she doesn't want to be a super-hero. She wants to be a singer. But when you have light powers and shoot laser beams out of your hands, it's a little hard to avoid using it at times. When she sees someone being mugged she certainly has the power to stop it and the courage to try to. She keeps getting into scrapes.

CF: So it's the "With great power comes great responsibility" trip?

LJ: Exactly, but it's kind of hard for her.

TD: She always denies it. He power frightens her. When she really cuts loose that kind of frightens her. With great power ***does*** come great responsibility but she'll never accept that.

LJ: She ***says*** she doesn't accept that but when the chips are down she goes out and does what she has to...

She's always sorry though. Not that she was successful, but that it took away from her music. We've ended up creating a tough life for the kid.

TD: For expample she actually gets a manager and almost loses him in the fourth issue because she has to run out and help someone who's getting beat up. She misses a concert performance because of it. She gets in lots of trouble because of that.

CF: Music is very hard to get across in comics. Have you managed to get around that?

"WE'VE ENDED UP CREATING A TOUGH LIFE FOR THE KID!"
WHEW! WHEN STORM ASKED IF I WAS GIVING UP SINGING, IT REALLY STRUCK HOME!
I GUESS I WAS FEELING SO GUILTY BECAUSE I'M GIVING UP BUT LIVING WITHOUT MUSIC COULD BE SO MUCH WORSE! I WON'T GIVE UP! I WON'T!!!

Two different **DAZZLERS**: The original splash

and the final J. Buscema/Romita Sr.-retouched version

TD: This is something that we don't know and won't really know until the book hits. The thing with music, just from a technical point of view, was that when we tried to decide how we were going to portray her singing, we tried balloons with musical notes in it and rhymed words and things like that. We realized that everything looked silly. Basically the music will be told through the captions—how it affects the audience. Whether or not we managed to get the effect across will have to wait until we get the reader reaction.

LJ: We really think this is the way to do it. The singing balloons really did look silly to me.

CF: What is the personality of the Dazzler? ***Does*** she have a personality after six cancellations?

LJ: Oh, sure she has a personality. It's not ***her*** fault that her book keeps getting cancelled, poor thing.

CF: Is her personality the same after all these incarnations?

LJ: Her personality is ***not*** the same...all her many incarnations in this book and that book...she was three different people. (I could say things about that but I'm too much of a lady.) I was absolutely annoyed at some of the ways she was portrayed.

TD: At one point Casablanca decided they wanted her to talk funky black.

LJ: Which would have been fine if she was funky and black...which I think she was in one incarnation.

TD: In one incarnation they wanted her to be black. You know when this was a commercial venture it was up to them but when Marvel took over the character we said "The Hell with them!"

LJ: We did what ***we*** pleased.

CF: So you don't feel bound by the three previous appearances of ***DAZZLER***?

TD: Ours is a sweeter person.

LJ: Bit more intelligent, too.

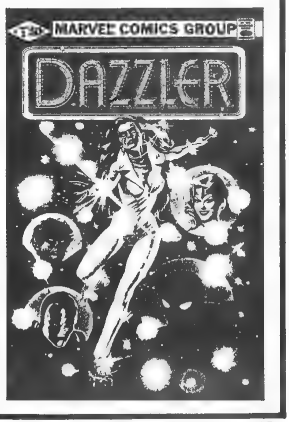
TD: But... if Roger Stern writes ***CAPTAIN AMERICA*** and McKenzie writes ***CA*** you get two different ***CA***'s. But there's enough in common...

LJ: The thing that upset me about doing ***DAZZLER*** three different ways was that there wasn't that much in common except the costume. It was because they didn't really know who she was at that point. Commercially I can understand how it worked out that way, but I wish it hadn't happened. She'll be wonderful when she gets her own comic.

TD: Also remember that at that time every day she was being changed. There is basically nothing in those appearances that is contradicted by what we're doing. The Dazzler I'm doing is a little different from the slick Dazzler that appeared in the ***NEW X-MEN***.

LJ: The way I see it she's gone through a lot. She was in college and then she had to make this big decision about whether she wanted to be a singer or go to law school the way her father wanted her to. My feeling is what probably happened is that she decided to be a singer and immersed herself in the Disco scene. She started talking funky and now she's mellowed out a bit. She's a mellower version. What with teenage rebellion what it is, Ive seen kids do this. They act wild and crazy and then settle down and turn into real people.

The cover for **DAZZLER #1**



"I LIKED THE DAZZLER BECAUSE I COULD SEE A LOT OF GOOD QUALITIES IN HER... SHE'S A NICE, SWEET PERSON... THE KIND WHO WOULD LOAN YOU A QUART OF MILK!!"

CF: So after all the changes from Casablanca and the evolution of the character it's finally stabilized into something you're comfortable with?

TD: I'm very comfortable with what we have. As soon as Casablanca had gotten out of it and we were producing what was basically a Marvel comic book I was happy with what we were doing. A lot of the frustration I had with the book getting cancelled—I have a problem as a writer, I've always had it—is that I grow attached to my characters and I do characters that I like. I liked ***The Dazzler*** because I could see a lot of good qualities in her. She's a nice, sweet person... the kind of person who would lend you a quart of milk. But anyway, it's a character I feel very comfortable with. I have no problems with her.

CF: So you're going to be writing Marvel superhero stories with her as the main character?

TD: I would say yes, basically because this is the business that we're in.

LJ: We're doing a Marvel comic for sure. It might be a cross between an ***ARCHIE*** and a Marvel... a soap opera. That's what good Marvel comics are: a soap opera.

CF: Like ***UPSTAIRS DOWNSTAIRS***.

LJ & TD: Exactly!

CF: High-class soap opera?

LJ: That's exactly what we're trying to do: high-class soap opera!!

TD: In the medium we're dealing with you have to have a certain amount of conflict or the story is boring. Because of the medium and the conflict has to be a super-villian.

LJ: Has to be visual, too.

TD: Yeah, and of course it has to be very visual. One of the early powers they wanted the ***Dazzler*** to have was the ability to make people tell the truth. That is like the most un-visual power I ever heard of. We're stuck with something like music where she needs sound to show light. Now light is damned visual. Sound is not. Sound to me means that I have to put in a lot of sounds in the captions and that I hope that kids who very rarely read captions will read these so they'll know where the sound is coming from. But the good thing about sound is that you are always surrounded by sound.

CF: How are you going to manage a Marvel style comic with a character who specifically says, "I don't want to be a superhero! I want to be a singer!"?

TD: Different ways.

LJ: When Marvel went from 17 to 22 pages we decided to put in a five-page origin scene so now there's a (Gasp! Choke!) ***"Origin of The Dazzler."***

TD: We actually have the origin in the first issue just like in a regular comic.

In the second issue there is also an actual ***fight scene***!

CF: How tangential to the Marvel universe will she be?

TD: She's going to be in the middle of it. She's going to date the Human Torch and Spider-man and non-superheroes.

LJ: She would be leading a very nice life if we didn't constantly put her in these situations where she had to punch out super-villains.

TD: By the fourth issue she's duked it out with Nightmare. She takes his on head to head. She beats him too.

CF: That's something that Dr. Strange was never able to do...

TD: Well, Dr. Strange isn't that violent as Dazzler. You put a real person in a situation where you humiliate and degrade them and when they get the chance to lash out, the ***do***. A standard super-hero gets into a situation and he's so used to dealing with his superpowers he takes it easy. Real violence comes from ordinary people. Stand around the subway at 5:00 and you'll see how violent people can get.

CF: What about her make-up?

LJ: It's like ***KISS***, sometimes you've got it and sometimes you don't.

TD: What it is is she wears the make-up when she's on stage. If she gets involved in an adventure after she's performed she wears the make-up throughout the adventure. If she's not wearing the make-up she doesn't put it on. She has no hassles, no secret identity. She doesn't consider herself a superhero. Her identity is ***"DAZZLER."*** Her real name is Alison Blaire but her identity is ***"DAZZLER."*** You know, like the people in the ***KISS*** group, or ***"Alice Cooper."*** That's basically the way she is. The wonderful thing about her is that people see her use her super-powers and not realize she's using super-powers. If somebody gets on stage and you see flashing lights you don't say, "Wow, this guy's got great powers!" You say, "Geez! Ain't bad! This is a great light show!" She can go and use her powers very blatantly. If people notice that she has them, so what? ***The Dazzler*** is a sweet, lovable girl. You look at her and say she's a sweet nice girl.

NMP
November

THE FANDOM ZONE

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No. 7

Fandom Almanac

COMICS CLUBS

Easley, SC. THE COLLECTORS CLUB. Monthly newsletter published. Membership: $5.00/year (includes 12 issues of newsletter). For info, contact: Steve Haynie, Rt. #6, Easley, SC 29640.

Fullerton, CA. WEST COAST COMICS CLUB. Meets at Fullerton Science Lecture Hall, #121, California State University, 7:00 p.m. Contact: Barry Short, 420 West 4th Street, San Dimas, CA 91773 (714) 599-2488.

Maplewood, N.J. COMICS CLUB MAPLEWOOD. Meets at 29 Norfolk Avenue, 8:00-9:00 p.m. Contact: Comic Club Maplewood, P.O. Box 65, Maplewood, NJ 07040.

Mt. Prospect, IL. PROSPECT HIGH SCHOOL COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Prospect High School, Room 130, 801 W. Kensington Rd., every Tuesday at 3:00 p.m. Contact: R. Marr.

Nepean, Ontario, Canada. INTERNATIONAL COMIC COLLECTOR'S CLUB. Publishes a quarterly magazine and bulletin. Membership is $10/year. Contact: Ken Gorman or Mike Berthiaume, P.O. Box 11336 Postal Station H, Nepean, Ontario, Canada K2H5Z0.

Phoenix, AZ. PHOENIX COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Quality Inn West, 2420 W. Thomas, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Contact: Neil Cohen, 3824 N. 15th Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85018 (602) 227-8701.

Pittsburgh, PA. PITTSBURGH COMIX CLUB. Meets at Eddie's Comix & SF Shop, 11 Federal Street, every second Saturday from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Contact: Ben Pondexter, 827 Anaheim, Pittsburgh, PA 15210.

Rochester, NY. COMIC BOOK PEN PAL CLUB. Newsletter published. For info, contact: The Comic Book Man, 135 Glen Ellyn Way, Rochester, NY 14618.

St. Louis, MO. SPECTOR COMICS CLUB. Meets at Century Bowl, 7508 Michigan, 1:00-4:00 p.m. Contact: Anthony Gladish, 3917 Ohio Street, St. Louis, MO 63118.

Urbana, IL. CHAMPAIGN-URBANA COMIC CLUB. Meets at the Illinois Union Building, Room 215, 712 W. Illinois, Urbana, every Thursday at 7:00 p.m. Contact: Mel DeSart.

Vancouver, B.C., Canada. VANCOUVER COMIC BOOK CLUB. Publishes the VCBC Bulletin and sponsors conventions. (V-Con). Contact: VCBC, P.O. Box 48873, Bentall Sta., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7X1A8.

COMICS CONVENTIONS

1) CHICAGO MINI-CON, Nov. 9th, at the Pick-Congress Hotel at 520 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Admission is 75¢.

2) CONNECTI-CON, Nov. 15 and 16, at the Holiday Inn, Hartford, CT. Movies and comic professionals are featured attractions. Admission is $3.50 for one day or $6.00 for both.

3) CREATION CON, Nov. 22 and 23, at the Holiday Inn at Genesee Plaza, 120 Main St. East, Rochester, NY. Guests include Mark Gruenwald, Keith Pollard, and Dave Sim. Special events include an auction, a costume parade, and an art contest. Admission is $7.50 for both days or $4.25 per day.

4) CREATION CON, Nov 28-30, at the New York Statler on 7th Ave. and 33rd in Manhattan. This is the special Thanksgiving Creation Con. Hundreds of guests usually show up. This year's special guests are Jim Shooter, Chris Claremont, John Byrne, and The Hildebrandt Brothers. Special events include many panels, two nights of movies, a costume parade, art shows, and auctions. Admission is $16.00 for all three days.

5) FIRST ANNUAL NORTH CENTRAL OHIO COMIC BOOK/SCIENCE FICTION CON, Nov. 8 and 9, at the Quality Inn-Park Place, 191 Park Ave., West Mansfield, Ohio. Guests include Don and Maggie Thompson and Craig Russell. Admission has not been set yet.

6) NEWCON, Nov. 15 and 16, at the Boston Sheraton. Guests include Joe Simon and Howard Chaykin. Special events include a Costume parade, panels, and movies. Admission has not been set yet.

7) PHIL SEULING'S COMIC BOOK MARKETPLACE, Nov. 16th at the Hotel Statler in New York. Admission is free.

8) WEST COAST CARD & COMIC COLLECTORS FAIR, Nov. 15 and 16, at the Pasadena Civic Center at 300 East Green St., Pasadena, CA. Admission is $1.25.

If you belong to a comics club or run a comics convention and would like to be listed in this space, please send all pertinent information to COMICS FEATURE, 31½ Roberts Rd. #2, Cambridge, MA 02138.

WELL-IT'S BOB'S DEAL SO WATCH HIM-BOYS-HEY! SUSAN-GIVE SHY TWO CHIPS.
REMEMBER, BOYS-IT'S HONESTY THAT PAYS.
IF YOU'RE HONEST IN THIS GAME GOD WILL PAY!
QUIET- BOYS-SAY-JESS-YOUR WIFE IS ON THE PHONE!

FANDOM ORIGINS PRESENTS:

"PALEOLITHIC FANDOM"

by Don and Maggie Thompson

This is the first in a multi-part history of comics fandom. We don't know how long the history will be or how much information will finally be crammed into it. It is, of necessity, the view of only two of the people who happened to be around for a big chunk of it; other comics fans will have had different experiences over the decades involved. If you have vital items of information on areas we seem to have slipped over, please let us know and we'll incorporate them into later reports. Don't be concerned if we have barrelled by the time in question; we can always go back to pick up a loose thread or insert a new color in the design. We'd also like to run photos of the Old Days and covers of old fanzines. The prints and copies of covers can be returned, if you'll include your name and address. Try to provide as much information as possible about what you send. Send letters of information, photos, and the like to us: Don and Maggie Thompson, FANDOM COMICS, 8786 Hendricks Road, Mentor, Ohio 44060.

In the Paleolithic Age, mankind began to use the earliest chipped stone tools. It knew about fire. It lived in caves and rock shelters. It made tools. If it were not for the existence of Paleolithic Man, we wouldn't have digital watches today.

Comics fandom had its own Paleolithic Age.

The Paleolithic world of comics fandom had no more than a few, scattered, short-lived focal points. It had no common fund of information, no organization, no frequent gatherings, no widely circulated fan magazines. Indeed, it had little knowledge of itself.

In part, this was because the world at large had little knowledge of comics. Comics were a disposable medium, whether in newspapers or in comic-book form.

It's really vital to understand this, and it seems hard for some people to time-bind to that extent. Comics were really, sincerely sneered at. Those who read them, read them once or twice and then threw them away. Parents felt they were doing their part to improve their childrens' minds by forbidding comic books in the house. Day-old newspapers were used to wrap the garbage, and comic strips were considered an unimportant part of newspapers.

Newspaper strips were light amusements to be tolerated, maybe even joked over. Even people who followed one strip or another with regularity didn't ***save*** any of them, except for the occasionally apt strip, which would be taped to a refrigerator or put on a co-worker's desk.

Paper drives and patriotism combined to remove the bulk of strips and comics from the world in a gigantic purge which had its follow-up about a decade later, when community bonfires were fed by comic books in a massive effort to clean children's minds by removing such pollution.

And where were the comics fans during all this?

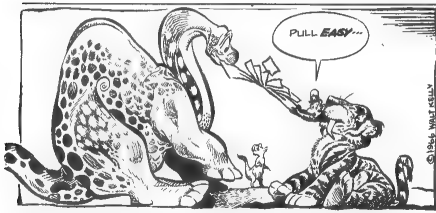
First we should make it clear that we're discussing an evolving world.

In the earliest days of comics collecting, what fans there were were strip collectors, because that's what was available. It wasn't always easy; ***THIMBLE THEATRE***, for example, couldn't have been collected in complete form at the time of Popeye's introduction, because the strip appeared on an irregular basis in every paper that ran it. (Only in the Hyperion Press edition, edited by Bill Blackbeard, have nearly all those strips been available from one source.)

There were people who admired particular cartoonists or strips. There were very occasional books of strip or cartoon reprints. The poet e.e. cummings wrote a paean of praise to the small-circulation strip ***KRAZY KAT***, and his article appeared in a ***KRAZY KAT*** hardcover collection. A few essayists singled out their favorites. There was even enough interest to warrant an infrequent hardcover book on the topic. ***COMICS AND THEIR CREATORS*** (by Martin Sheridan) came out in 1942, selecting a group of cartoonists, giving their biographies and a brief sample of their work. In 1947, Coulton Waugh discussed American strips to that point in ***THE COMICS***. Stephen Becker's 1959 ***COMIC ART IN AMERICA*** was an attempt to discuss comic art to that point in a big books with ***lots*** of samples. As you can see, such books were few and far between.

But, despite comic books having become well established (in fact, past the point of their highest circulation) by the time of Becker's book, he de-

Fandom Zone



voted more space to ***sports*** cartoons in ***COMIC ART IN AMERICA*** than he did to comic books. Comic books had been introduced in the 1930's and had become steadily more popular through World War II. They provided cheap, fast reading that could entertain a kid after school or a soldier on a ten-minute break; stories could be consumed swiftly and dropped hurriedly, if necessary. Comics could be concealed in school workbooks and, if they were confiscated, their loss did not mean financial disaster. Comics of all kinds were enormously popular and could be doled out to kids as rewards for good behavior, as timekillers on long trips, and as cheap gifts for special occasions. They were unimportant but fun and could be traded or hoarded, depending on the mood of the moment.

But no one took them particularly seriously. By the end of World War II, science-fiction fandom was a firmly established group of admirers of a type of creative fiction. There were dozens of amateur magazines devoted to science fiction and the people who read it, and there were many clubs with regular meetings. There were even annual world science-fiction conventions. But no one thought of holding such an event for readers of comics.

Comics fans collected comic books and strips almost clandestinely. Ted White once was the topic of a newspaper article which brought him intense public attention—and embarrassment —as the collector of thousands of comics. The paper dubbed him "The boy with 10,000 comics," although he had far more comics than that. Most collectors avoided that sort of attention and went so far as to hide their hobby from their friends. There were a few dealers, most of whom carried comics as sideline—a few forlorn boxes in the back of the garage were assigned to hold the accumulation garnered when more "collectible" magazines passed through their hands. Second-hand shops sometimes got in old comics and threw them in a bin, where careful rummaging could sometimes produce items of rare age and fragility—at two for a dime.

But (and this is, perhaps, most difficult to convey) almost no one knew ***anything*** about the field as a whole, not to mention knowing anything about fellow collectors. If you collected, say, Harvey's strip reprints of ***STEVE CANYON***, you had ***STEVE CANYON #7*** forever on your wantlist. Why? Because there was an ***ad*** for ***#7*** in ***#6***, complete with a picture of the cover of ***#7***. Heck, you ***knew*** it was real, because you'd seen it displayed in that ad. But it was never published, and you had no way of knowing it didn't exist unless you'd had a subscription to the Harvey strip reprints (in which case, to the injury of the death of a favorite comic was added the insult of having your subscription filled out with dismal issues of ***SAD SACK***).

There was ***no*** list anywhere of the Dell special number series. We know, because we wrote to Western (home of the editorial offices) and asked. No such list existed, we were assured. So we began to compile one. It took years to finish, and that was ***after*** comics fandom had been born to help us with the struggle. But we're getting ahead of the story.

Do you have the picture? There was a fandom, but it was devoted to science fiction; if you collected comics, you were a weirdo. (Actually, that's still true, but now we weirdos have the clout of commercialism, which legitimizes us in many people's eyes.) Some few weirdos in science-fiction fandom would occasionally parade their strangeness in front of their fellows. Now and then, an article would appear in a fanzine of the time in praise of a certain comic book or strip.

SF fandom had its favorites. ***POGO***, by the gifted and extraordinary Walt Kelly, was discovered by some SF fans as a special delight even before it began as a newspaper strip in the New York ***STAR*** in 1948. When Kelly's work became more politically oriented, it attracted even more SF fans (and Kelly knew quite a bit about the SF field himself). Two Big Name Fans (Walt Willis and Bob Shaw) did a parody of ***POGO*** in ***FEN CRITTUR COMICAL BOOKS***, for example; and ***THE BULLETIN OF THE CLEVELAND SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY*** #13 (March 30, 1952, edited by Harlan Ellison) carried an article ***"ON STF COMIX AND SUCH"*** by Ralph Reese (or Beese; because of a flaw in mimeographing, it's hard to say). (That article began by bewailing the fact that people tended to judge science fiction by the lousy SF in comics of the day, but concluded that readers should take a look at EC's lineup. "Their art is top-notch stuff. Really fine work by artists who you can tell are not hacks but take pride in their work. Leading the artists of these magazines is a fellow named ***WALLY WOOD*** who should certainly be looked up by the promags." Eventually, he was. Wood did quite a bit of SF art for such magazines as ***GALAXY*** after the death of EC.)

It was the EC readers who first formed their own comics fandom. Such fanzines as ***POTRZEBIE*** and ***HOOHAH*** (both EC jargon) came out with background articles on the line and its doings—and provided a forum for admirers of a line of comics. The desire to provide communication links led to a

list of readers Ron Parker ran in ***HOO-HAH*** #9 (October 1957). It included John Benson, E. Nelson Bridwell, Bill Gaines, Archie Goodwin, Larry Ivie, Bill Meyers, Marty Pahls, Larry Stark, Bob Stewart, Fred von Bernewitz, and Ted White. There was a grand total of 44 plus the editor, not exactly a world-shaking size for a fandom. However, it included quite a few who are notable for their fannish longevity.

(EC had, itself, encouraged interest in forming a fandom, with its fan-addict club, complete with newsletter. But the Comics Code killed the comic-book EC's, and the club went with them.)

There were other fanzines in those early days, none of them lasting very long (or, at least, none of them producing many issues). You'll find a list in Bob Overstreet's current ***THE COMIC PRICE GUIDE***, Bob Stewart's ***EC FAN BULLETIN***, Jimmy Taurasi's ***FANTASY COMICS*** (one zine that was not EC-centered; it was fantasy-comics-centered), Mike May's ***EC FAN JOURNAL***, and George Jennings' ***EC WORLD PRESS***.

When EC went under as a comic-book publisher, the fans found their interests diverted to other channels, though some continued to collect comics. The world of comics collecting reverted to pretty much what it had been, single fans in separate communities who picked up wanted items when and where they could.

We met on June 8, 1957, at a science-fictional picnic at the home of SF writer and fan Basil Wells. (Also there were such people as Andre Norton, P. Schuyler Miller, Ed Hamilton, and Leigh Brackett.) We hit it off at once and spent the day talking SF. But we found also a common bond in comics and talked about such topics as ***L'IL ABNER***, ***POGO***, and EC. (Our first contact by mail came that fall when Don sent Maggie a copy of the first issue of ***HUMBUG***, Harvey Kurtzman's first magazine after the ill-fated ***TRUMP***.) But our luck in finding each other was not typical of comics fans as a group.

Virtually anyone could pose as an

"expert" on comics, because few people could challenge the accuracy of a statement. (Comics companies almost never credited their artists and writers. Nor was there much information on comic strips. Don was actually present at one SF con party where one fan talked for a long time about his "inside information" on the industry. He told, for example, of the sad case of Leona Starr, a woman who couldn't sell her strip under a woman's name. The poor lady had to adopt the pseudonym of "Leonard Starr" in order to sell ***ON STAGE***. Well, who besides Leonard Starr and his friends could have contradicted this windy con artist? Who knew whether an "expert" was making things up as he went along? There was just no source of reliable facts on the field for the general public.)

Then came Labor Day Weekend 1960. The World Science-Fiction Convention was held in Pittsburgh that weekend, and we attended. (Maggie stayed with her parents in their rooms; Don was in a single; it was two years before we were married.)

It was a lovely convention. Randy Garrett and Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein and Judy Merril and James Blish and a vast crunch of other people attended a party in Maggie's parents' rooms. Maggie's family plus Don won "Best Group" at the costume Ball.

But there was another "group" that got a lot of attention at that ball. Not many people knew who they were, but a fan couple from New York got admiring glances. They were Dick and Pat Lupoff, and they were dressed as Captain and Mary Marvel.

And if you don't know why ***that*** is important in the history of comics fandom, join us next month for ***"IT WAS COMICS TIME."***

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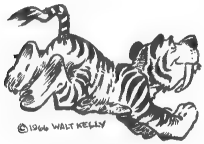


RIDE THE TIGER

"HOW TO MAKE $20,000 A YEAR WRITING SWORD-AND-SORCERY CLAP-TRAP."

by Bob Jennings

I doubt that there is a serious science fiction or comic fan alive who has failed to notice the incredible explosion over the past few years of the so-called "Heroic Fantasy" adventure story. The "Heroic Fantasy" to refresh your memory, is a mindless epic in which a super strong barbarian battles with naked sword in one hand and naked damsel in the other, against overwhelming forces of magic and monster, through numerous muddy chapters of bloody carnage, to the inevitable sex scene closing and happy ending.

Now, I am normally a very tolerant and understanding person. I fully realize that the world is now composed of millions of separate individuals, and that many of these people have read-preferences which would strike a reasonably sane and intelligent person as absolutely ridiculous. I accept with calm dignity the fact that a large portion of the female population buys and devours great quantities of the sex-and-slander tragedies unfolded in true confession magazines. I can assimilate, with no more than a natural shudder, the knowledge that a certain type of male must continuously reassure his faltering self-confidence by reading and rereading the fictional war battles and scenes of military exploration that are revealed in the so-called men's magazines which clutter up otherwise attractive news racks.

I like to feel that I can forgive even the most idiotic and perverted reading habits, but, frankly, I've had it up to here and then some with the "Heroic Fantasy" adventure story. It has gotten to the point where you cannot walk anywhere close to a drug store paperback rack without being assaulted by dozens of garish covers of half-naked savages lunging with stone jawed determination at some scaly green dinosaur or whacking away at clouds of blue-white magic smoke while some long-haired fifteen year old nymph with size forty-two boobs pants and wiggles in the background.

The book and paperback shelves are infested with this garbage: the literary droppings of editors and writers, who, one would presume, should have had more common sense and good taste. The stories are contrived, stilted, verbose exercises in irrationality; the characters are all cut from tissue paper: and the writing could be described in the kindest terms as pure drivel. The open-eyed gullibility of the buying public in accepting this invasion of concentrated mediocrity is almost as incredible as the plotlines that make up these books. There seems to be, literally, no saturation point; no limit to what readers will beg for.

Well, far be it from me to attack the latest form of literary lunacy. Ob-

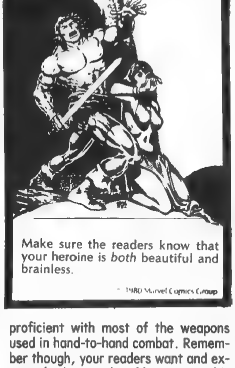
viously the publishers and their back office hacks have struck a virtual gold mine here. No matter how many times the same old plot is rewritten, no matter how depraved and tasteless the descriptions are, or how insane the character motivation, the readers continue to soak these things up at an incredible rate.

If this is what the public wants, and is willing to pay for, then I say let's **all** join the parade. There's a mint of money waiting to be made from this sort of mental pap, and apparently all one needs to hit the jackpot is to study, and religiously adhere to, a few basics of outline, form, and plotwork.

For example, before you start to write your epic, it is best to choose some catchy name for your hero, something that rolls off the toungue and has a sort of hard, macho sound to it: Names like Conan, Kull, Blade, Thongor all leap to mind immediately. You will notice that most of these are one-syllable words, but don't be afraid to use two or even three syllables for your name. Personally I've always felt that Hernia would make a very fitting name for one of these characters. You should restrict your name to the upper limit of three syllables however, in deference to the intellectual capacity of your reading audience, a good many of whom had considerable difficulty passing their seventh-grade reading tests, and who will likely be enjoying your epic while moving their lips and picking their noses.

Your hero should be cast as a rogue and an outlaw, a known warrior of considerable skill and outstanding courage, but, (always the but), with a secret heart of gold and a strong sense of morality. It is very important that you say your few words about his strong sense of morality early on in the story, because later, when the blood and guts start to fly, it will be considerably more difficult to work such a blatantly ridiculous statement in edgewise between all the brutality and butchery.

Your hero must be a bronzed giant, superbly muscled, a born warrior, and



Make sure the readers know that your heroine is *both* beautiful and brainless.

— 1980 Marvel Comics Group

proficient with most of the weapons used in hand-to-hand combat. Remember though, your readers want and expect the hero to be able to prove his manhood on the merits of his physical abilities. To show him using such realistic or practical weapons as a bow and arrow, or a javelin, or any other weapon which allows him to knock off an opponent without being in much danger himself is strictly frowned on.

You must also remember that the bulk of your audience have had their sexual development abruptly arrested somewhere in early adolescence. They will invariably regard your hero's primary weapon, which should be a massive broadsword, as a symbolic penis. For this reason the sword should be described as being at least two thirds as tall as the hero himself, a wicked, massive instrument honed to razor-edged sharpness and so heavy that a normal man might have trouble lifting it at all. Your hero, of course, manages to wield it in one hand with speed and dexterity.

Your hero must be cast out alone on the shifting sands of life's perpetual desert, survivng solely because of his strength, his raw animalistic cunning, and his experience as a skilled warrior. This position will draw your readers into the action and avoid such anchoring connections with their own rather drab existences, as family, home, tedious employment, and mountains of unpaid bills.

Your hero must stumble across a girl usually somewhere early in the story. The girl must be just that: a girl, not a woman. She should be described in your best style so as to embody every man's secret sexual fantasies. This is not going to be easy, since every male entertains, at a minimum, four or five idealized sexual fantasy females which he likes to fall back on and consider from time to time. But, again, remember that your audience has probably had minimal experience with members of the opposite sex and very likely none at all beyond the junior high co-ed softball match. The safest bet is to keep the heroine in tune with established adolescent prototypes.

She should be described as young, supple, innocent, doe-eyed, docile and passive. Don't forget the heavy breasts and the sensual hips. Of course you probably realize that real women have emotions, opinions, and personalities, but you mustn't let these considerations get in the way of your writing. Your heroine should have none of these encumberances. She should be pictured as the willing, innocent slave-girl type, whose entire existence is devoted either to hanging onto the arm of the hero while gazing longingly and passionately up into his eyes or to fullfilling his every sexual desire whenever and wherever he chooses to engage in carnal activities. Frankly, our hero could get more emotional stimulation from a cocker-spaniel puppy and his good right hand, but your reading public, whose dream worlds cannot abide any thought of competition, especially from female sex symbols, will not complain—or likely even notice.

The girl must have a problem. This problem must be serious. The peril must be imminent. It must be realistic or human in origin and seemingly easy

to handle. Several pages can be devoted here to knocking over a group of armed warriors, or a wide variety of slimy sneaky beasts can be encountered who are hot on the trail of the girl. Our hero may or may not recognize that these simple sword bouts are but the preliminary phases of the grand campaign. The armed warriors are but the pawns of a diabolical mastermind, an evil intelligence who is directing this fiendish activity from afar, in short, Our Villain.

The Villain must be introduced with subtlety, yet with a strong sense of menace and terror. Villains in these stories always fall into three broad classifications. The most popular is the evil human being, usually ageless, who has mastered the magical arts and now decides he wants to conquer the whole known world. At the very least, he has declared that he lusts for and must possess the heroine, whom he plans to debase and deflower publicly in the nearest open-air market place.

The second choice for villain is the Strange Force, demon, ancient god, or some other malignant force of nature or mis-creation who has evil purpose and strange intelligence, not to say even stranger powers, magical or otherwise. Its primary mission is usually to kill and destroy everything in its path. Its ultimate aim is generally either to expand its sphere of influence, thus endangering cities and possibly whole kingdoms, or else to lure fresh human food into its' gaping hungry maw.

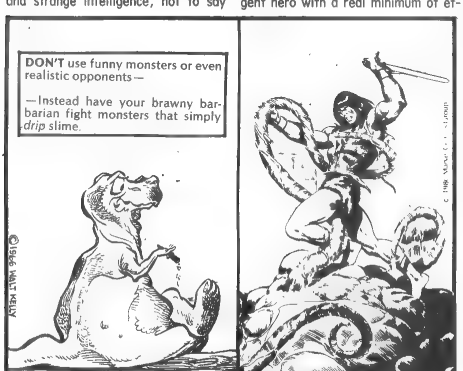
The third class of villain is useful when not overused. This is your basic everyday overgrown monster. He can be a super-mutated-giant-sized-ninety two-foot-long, earth worm, a suitably grotesque creature from the lower pits of hell, a leftover dinosaur from the past, or a scaled flying monstrosity out to rip our hero to shreds with his knife-like claws. Most monsters have no special evil intent, so you've got to be careful to give them one. Make them all confirmed man-eaters or defenders of their ancestral breeding grounds which just happen to be the locations of some fabulous lost treasure hoard.

In any event, even readers of these thud-and-blunder stories will realize that monsters, no matter how large, can be handled by an alert and intelligent hero with a real minimum of effort. Use simple monsters sparingly. Even a dolt will realize that a carefully placed stick of dynamite can wipe out even the worst of them in a short fifteen seconds. Even your ***hero*** ought to be able to figure out that a five hundred pound boulder dropped at an opportune moment can cut your fantasy epic short rather quickly.

Have really nasty man-eating monsters attack your hero That way your readers won't be too upset when it gets hacked to pieces.

The menace must be developed and carefully nurtured. Hordes of trifling adversaries and stumbling blocks can be erected along the way before Our Villain and Our Hero reach the story's ultimate climax. At four cents a word, the sensible and discerning hack will quickly find his hero up to his arm pits in squiggly little monsters or hacking away at armies of magically-endowed warriors who must be cleaned out through many pages of conflict before the inevitable meeting of Hero and Villain occurs.

Now a word about the action. Don't be shy in describing it. Even if you have no knowledge of sword play or hand-to-hand combat, don't let this deter you from giving it the old college try. The pages should be awash with blood and gore. Do not be deterred by false emotions of squeamishness or belated rememberances of standards of good taste. These brutal and sadistic blood-baths are one of the high points of the story for your devoted audience, most of whom are unable to


DON'T use funny monsters or even realistic opponents—
—Instead have your brawny barbarian fight monsters that simply drip slime.
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cope with even life's simpler problems and who get a real emotional charge from all this vicarious interaction. No brutality can be considered too extreme. Have your hero carve up his opponents a joint at a time. Lob off arms and extremities at will. Have him plunge his broadsword deep into the bowels of his opponents with as much detail and gore as you can possibly stand. Stories of tangled intestines or dripping, still pulsating organs flying across the blood-coated stone floors are the stuff of dreams to the mental defectives who read this sort of fiction.

As a minor corollary here, your heroine or an associate of the hero can be captured by the Villain while the hero is slashing the opposition into cold cuts or otherwise exerting his manhood. In this case you must remember that torture is certainly going to be applied, and the rules outlined above must be adhered to even more stringently here. No vision of human sadism can be considered too extreme. However, it is better to merely ***threaten*** vile torture when dealing with the heroine. The actual torture itself, in great detail, can be applied to some other luckless female invented just for this purpose. Nothing must seriously mar the picteresque perfection of our heroine's supple body. A simple brutal flogging engagingly described in full detail over the next four or five pages should have your readers jerking off in the background and still leave our heroine physically able to perform ***her*** sexual duties when the hero breaks in and finally rescues her.

And of course that's the next scene. The Big Showdown. It might be helpful if you read a few current western novels to see how the competition sets the stage emotionally for this dramatic moment. The villain must be completely confident of final victory. He must have amazing abilities and strange powers at his command. The hero must not, repeat, ***must not***, be confident of victory. He must have secret doubts, he might also be wounded, or at the very least, weak and exhausted after his previous efforts. But, he is impelled to engage in the final battle by his long neglected sense of morality (which you may have forgotten about during the blood feast, along with the vast majority of your readers).

The idea of dying for a Great Ideal is a cherished dream of adolescence, and it is something your readers will accept immediately, especially since their lives have so little real meaning anyway. They will identify completely with your hero in this situation, and the heavier the odds are against him, the more they will be rooting for him to win.

The Big Battle can last many pages, but for the best results, limit your action here. Use a lot of heavy handed description to fill out the space. The titantic struggle must naturally end with the forces of Good, the hero, triumphing over Evil, the villain. If you want to use some convenient freak accident here, feel perfectly free to do so. ***Deus Ex Machina*** is a literary device you'd damn well better never use in any other form of literature, but it is not only accepted, but even expected in many of these thud-and-blunder epics. So if your villain trips over his magic amulet and falls into the pot of boiling wax he was going to pour over the heroine, so much the better. However, since this is supposed to be a sorcery story, it's better if he trips the catch on the demon's cage, or steps outside his magic pentagram, or is eaten alive by his own slimy beasties. This not only saves the hero from getting killed, but it also proves again that meddling with science and knowledge and other forbidden realms will always lead to disaster.

And then of course, the smash closing. With the blood still dripping from his sword, his pain-wracked body bleeding and bruised, our hero hurls himself onto the panting body of his lady fair, and they make passionate love in a red fury. End of story.

There is ample room here for invention and development of any particular menaces of separate adventure styling you may care to work on. But be warned that deviation from this stereotyped outline will result in rejection slips by the boxload. Creativity in any degree will be recognized as a threat to the security of this womb world, and publishers, who are almost as dumb as you'd like to believe, will reject originality in your story without a qualm or even a word of explanation.

Stick to the basics, and hold down your typewriter. If you work within the outlines we've discussed I confidentially predict that within a few short months you'll be the newest successful writer, an accepted follower of the Heroic Fantasy format. And when you get to the conventions with a dozen or so stories under your belt and thirty grand in the bank, you'll be quickly mobbed by hundreds of adoring pimply-faced teens pleading for your autograph and a few condescending words. One or two of whom may actually turn out to be long-haired fifteen-year-old nymphs with forty-two inch bust lines. ***Then*** you're on your ***own***, fella.

Trufan Confessions

by Jay Zilber

This is the second installment of a multi-part series on getting started as a fanzine publisher. This month's column addresses the preliminaries to beginning a fanzine; next month we'll deal with the physical preparation of copy and artwork reproduction; the following installment will be concerned with fanzine financing and distribution; and the last part of the series will be given over to specific questions and comments about fanzine publishing from the audience. Please address your "Trufan Confessions" letters to: Jay Zilber, 315 East Fifth Street #4A, New York, NY 10003.

The single most important purpose of comics fandom—indeed, perhaps the greatest rationalization for the **existence** of our peculiar sub-culture/hobby/way-of-life—is Communication. I say this at the risk of being redundant; it's a theme I've been pounding away at since this column's very inception, six issues ago, because it's so easy to lose sight of this simple truth. No matter what fannish activities you're involved with, communication is at the core. And the very backbone of fandom is the fan press, without which there would be no organization of organized fandom, no rallying points to bring us together, no exchange of ideas, opinions and creativity; no method to our very special, wonderful madness.

The problem I seek to address here is that facing the publisher who is just starting out. Most first-time fanzine publishers have only the vaguest notions and assumptions to work from, and they are responsible (however unintentionally) for those innumerable ill-planned, unimaginative, poorly-reproduced, just-plain-unattractive specimens commonly known as "crudzines," which have plagued fandom throughout its twenty-some year history. It's almost inevitable: when the publishing bug bites you, it won't go away until you have a copy of your very own fanzine to swat it with. Most folks will blindly jump right into the field whether they're ready or not.

It is, after all, an exciting prospect to see your very own words or pictures leap out at you from the printed page for the very first time. But if you cannot interest **others** in reading your fanzine whether because of poor content quality, reproduction, or whatever, then communication is not taking place. You're just talking to yourself, and thereby defeating the fanzine's primary purpose.

So, the question "How do I get started in fanzine publishing?" is a misleading one. The first problem to be addressed should be, "Am I ready?"

Or alternately, you could ask, "How do I build a doghouse?" You can easily see in your mind the simplicity of its design: four walls and an angled roof. And yet, you can't just construct a doghouse directly from your stream of consciousness. An architect's design must come first, to clarify and establish in advance such important points as its precise size and measurements, the type of joints to be used where one slab of wood meets another, and even the type of material or finish that will make the final product waterproof, weather-resistant, and comfortable for its four-legged occupant. After all, whatever the thrill or satisfaction you might get from building the doghouse, it won't mean doodly-squat if Rover won't sleep in it. Advance planning is what makes the difference between a professional job and an amateur catastrophe.

Likewise, a fanzine must have the same sort of advance planning if it is to succeed—if not explicitly diagrammed on paper, then at least implicitly understood and carefully thought-out in your own mind. You must decide why you are publishing, and what you hope to accomplish by doing so. At this point, "communication" goes without saying. Be more specific! Are you trying to devise a small, personal zine through which to correspond simultaneously with a small circle of friends who share an interest in comics? Or do you have in mind a larger scale, to develop a network of communication among old friends, reaching out to new ones in the process? Are you in search of feedback on your writing skills? Artwork skills? Production skills? In search of the sheer ego boost that comes of being a big-name fan publisher? Are you inclined to entertain yourself with your own original stories or comic strips, or to clarify your thoughts and opinions by exchanging them with others, expanding your outlook on matters fannish and otherwise? Have you any specific goals at all? (If not, then may I suggest you get a good flyswatter? It's a lot cheaper than publishing a fanzine to swat the bug with.) Whatever you decide are your underlying motives, ***make it a conscious decision!*** if you can't explain what your fanzine is trying to accomplish, then its hazy, directionless nature will make clear

When the publishing Bug bites you, it won't go away until you have a copy of your very own fanzine to swat it with.

that you were so consumed by the desire to publish ***anything at all*** that the zine has no other reason for existence than bug-swatting.

There are countless variations and categories of fanzines to choose from; in fact, each publisher injects his/her own personality into their publication to some extent, so that every fanzine ever published is in one way or another unique. But this does not give you license to merely take somebody else's fanzine premise and do it over in your own image. Comics fans are often notoriously demanding in their search for Originality in the comics field, and yet fan publishers rarely think to turn their scrupulous standards on themselves. Hopefully, you'll want to do a fanzine that will stand out as something special, filling a niche in the fan press that is presently vacant—even if it requires that you create the niche yourself.

This is not to say that you shouldn't allow yourself any ***influences***. By all means, a would-be publisher must know the field thoroughly, to get some idea of what is already coming out of the fan press, and what has been done in the past. You must determine for yourself what elements of which fanzines are successful and come closest to the sort of thing you'd like to do yourself... with the understanding that if it ***is*** already being done, there's no use in simply doing more of the same.

For example: ten years ago there was no single, comprehensive comics newszine to be found; even the long-lived ***COMIC READER*** at that time was receiving only limited cooperation from the comics companies. So nearly every fanzine publisher tried to line up an inside source, an informed (and often anonymous) artist or writer or editor who could provide them with the grist for a comics news column. But right now, there is just no earthly reason for any fanzine publisher to start a newszine or straight news column, since the current comics market is (to say the least) amply covered in at least four major publications. Some of them go into greater detail or emphasize different things, but to a large extent they're just duplicating one another's work, wasting energies that could better be channelled elsewhere. Likewise, there's no use in starting a new adzine; ***THE BUYER'S GUIDE*** may leave much to be desired, but it serves its purpose. You won't be able to rival its circulation, and there are better, more rewarding things for a creative publisher to do than print other people's ads.

Most folks will opt for the standard-issue General Interest Comics Fanzine, which can include a smattering of everything or anything: essays, articles, news analysis, indexes, reviews, amateur comic strips or fan fiction, trivia tests, spot illos and cartoons, and—no fanzine is complete without them—a nice, chatty letter column and a self-indulgent editorial to round out the issue. This is a perfectly valid, time-tested approach to fanzine publishing, and as a matter of convenience we'll take this approach to designing our prototype first issue of ***FANZOID!*** over the course of this discussion. It's important to realize, however, that ***because*** so many fanzines take this approach, it will be no small trick to make this one stand out in the crowd. It will all depend on which parts of ***FANZOID!***'s contents are emphasized, and the manner in which they are organized and presented. For instance, if you're an aspiring artist, you may want to make it more of a stripzine. Or, if "you" are a group of fans in search of a club newsletter, then obviously you'll slant things toward the promotion of your club and its news and projects. But it will take extra conscious effort (and probably some trial and error) to provide ***FANZOID!*** with a wholly original twist, in a manner that will make it both reflect your own specific personality and interests ***and*** spark the interest of its potential audience.

So with a vague notion that ***FANZOID!*** will be a typical—yet in some ways unique—general interest zine (or "genzine"), the next question to be dealt with is this: Do I have what it takes to be a fanzine publisher in the first place?

Publishing is not a field to enter lightly. You will be channeling large amounts of spare time and fairly substantial amounts of money into this project. If it later turns out that you don't really have the right aptitudes, then ***FANZOID!***'s primary purpose will not be communication—it will be fodder for your local recycling center. As I touched on last month, a fanzine editor must start with certain basic skills in writing, spelling, and proofreading; and some training in art or graphic design is only slightly less than indispensable. Part of the whole fanzine experience is to ***learn*** these things by doing them—but if you're starting totally cold, your fanzine may not last long enough for you to learn anything at all...

Most fanzine editors start out as fan artists or writers. And anyone with serious ambitions in these fields will tell you that the only way to learn them is to write, write, write, and draw, draw, draw. When you get tired of it, draw and write instead. In this limited space available to me, it's the only helpful hint I can squeeze in: PRACTICE.

When you feel that your skills have reached a comfortable level of competency—get a second opinion. Try contributing to somebody else's fanzine before you start your own. Most fan publishers will welcome submissions with open arms. It's a much easier way of getting exposure and feedback than to jump into publishing cold and it will give you a stronger advance perspective of what you're getting into. (See Rules for Writers and Artists, below.)

Also, I cannot more emphatically recommend that a would-be future fanzine contributor/publisher test their skills on a small, economical scale, by joining an amateur press association. There is simply no better way to learn the basics of printing and publishing than to assemble a few zines on the small scale that apas use.

They will require you to contribute a small apazine on a regular basis, and the experience of joining an apa will expose you to a wide variety of other fans' creative ideas, artwork and prose styles, and to their approaches to layout and design. An apa membership will improve your typing, provide you with basic insights on preparing copy for reproduction, and it will force you to learn how to meet deadlines. The cost of assembling a small apazine and maintaining membership dues for a year will be perhaps 1/10th that of a medium-budget fanzine.

And of major importance—by joining an apa, you'll get to know thirty or forty or fifty other fan writers and artists; you'll get a feel for their particular skills and interests. And chances are, more than a few of your fellow members will be interested in getting in on the start of a new fanzine. A ready-made field of potential contributors!

Speaking of which... let's take this opportunity to dispell Myth Number One about fanzine contributions. ***You do not need pro artwork or big names to sell a fanzine.*** All you need is good artwork and quality writing. A fanzine should offer its readers what only a fanzine can; articles, stories, drawings and strips by talented ***fans***. Few readers are going to be so ecstatic over the appearance of a con sketch by their favorite artist that they would buy a fanzine on that merit alone... especially when they can get an entire ***book*** of the artist's finished work (in color!) off the newsstands each month for a paltry 50¢. We'll deal with pros when we get into legitimate alternative publishing.

The problem is, how do you ***find*** talented fans to contribute to your fanzine? There are no easy answers to that, short of producing the entire first issue yourself. You can solicit contributors from the apas you belong to, or from the contributors to ***other*** fanzines whose work you like. You can contact people whose names and addresses appear in DC and Marvel letter columns. And of course, you can round up your local friends and associates.

Whatever you do, keep in mind two important points. First, do not solicit blindly! I know of one fanzine editor who got hold of some apa rosters and asked everybody on them to do comics reviews for him. He may have gotten a few reviews, but he also managed to amuse—or annoy—a great many apans who were largely out of touch with current comics. Had this fanzine editor bothered to ***join*** the apa, he'd have known the specific interests and disinterests of each member, and contacted only the ones who were likely to give him a positive response. Instead, he managed to alienate everyone else who—if not contributors—might otherwise have been potential ***subscribers***.

And second: as editor, your name goes at the top of the list of contributors, and you must take the responsibility for everything they do. You will have the final say on what goes into the fanzine, what gets left out, and what needs to be fixed. If an article is boring or drawing badly executed, you must decide whether to reject it altogether, return it for corrections and revisions, or fix it yourself. These are not easy decisions to make when your contributors are likely to be your friends, but you must set your standards. If the spelling and grammar in an article is weak, it's up to you to fix it. You may have to go in with an axe, cut it up, and delete or revise substantial portions... but if it's got to be done, so be it. Deal with each contributor individually; some will be grateful to you for fixing their mistakes; others may be sensitive or downright indignant that you would dare to meddle with the creative integrity of their work—and in some cases it may be justifiable, righteous indignation. There's no point in alienating all your friends; be firm when it's necessary, and flexible when you might be wrong.

Once you've ***published*** your first fanzine, finding contributors will be no problem at all. A new fanzine is a veritable magnet for unsolicited contributions, and you'll have a much easier time soliciting material by sending a copy of your fanzine along with a polite invitation to the people you'd like to work for you. Still, let's not jump the gun here; we've got to prepare the layouts and paste-ups, and publish and distribute the first issue first... which is where we'll resume this discussion next month.●

NINE BASIC RULES FOR ARTISTS

1. Use solid black, waterproof ink.
2. Erase your pencils.
3. Sign it. And date it.
4. Use a stiff bristol board or paper manufactured specifically for ink drawing. Most common paper stocks (such as ordinary typing bond) are too absorbent and will cause your ink lines to spread.
5. Use other drawings, photographs or live models for reference. Though a bit of a crutch, swiping is by no means a legal or moral crime. (Tracing, on the other hand, is both.)
6. Send it in a stiff, unbendable package. Writing "do not bend" on the envelope is not sufficient; it is official post office policy to bend anything that is not genuinely unbendable.
7. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want the publisher to confirm receipt, and enclose sufficient return postage if you want your artwork returned after publication.
8. Keep a photostat or a clean, sharp Xerox copy in case it's lost in the mail.
9. Put your name and address on all artwork you would like to see returned.

EIGHT BASIC RULES FOR WRITERS

1. Type it.
2. Double-space between lines; use a 1" margin on both sides, top and bottom.
3. Brevity is a virtue. Make your point; don't run it into the ground, or spruce it up with five-dollar words.
4. Edit and rewrite it. Do a third draft if necessary. The final copy should be clean and free of conspicuous hand-written corrections and revisions.
5. Put your name and address on your manuscript.
6. If it's longer than three or four pages, send it in a 9 x 12 manila envelope.
7. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped post card if you want the publisher to confirm receipt.
8. Keep a carbon or Xerox copy in case it's lost in the mail. Better yet, keep the original and send a clear copy to the publisher.

20 Years Ago this Month

EXTRA! A NEW "STAR HAWKINS" STORY!
STRANGE ADVENTURES
Featuring DAVID and the SPACE-GOLIATH!
HOLD YOUR FIRE! GIVE YOUNG DAVID A CHANCE TO USE HIS SLINGSHOT AGAINST THAT ALIEN GIANT!

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TALES OF SUSPENSE
IT IS GOR-KILL! HE IS RISING OUT OF THE WATER, JUST AS WE FEARED!
BEFORE YOUR VERY EYES, YOU SHALL SEE
GOR-KILL, THE LIVING DEMON" COME TO LIFE!

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GIRL FRIEND
LOIS LANE
Featuring "The BATTLE BETWEEN SUPER-LOIS and SUPER-LANA!"
SUPERMAN, NOW THAT I HAVE SUPER-POWERS, YOU'LL WANT ME FOR A WIFE!
NO! ME! I HAVE SUPER-POWERS, TOO!
LOIS! LANA! STOP FIGHTING!
BOTH LOIS AND LANA HAVE GAINED PERMANENT SUPER-POWERS!

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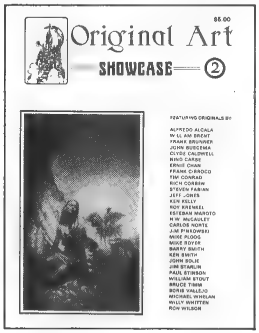

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The Silver Age of Comics

CHAPTER VI

by Brian C. Boerner

When last we left our heroes, they had been struck a mortal blow by the concept known as "camp"! Spearheaded by the popularity of the Batman TV series, the "camp" influence invaded comics with a vengeance, sometimes totally warping the books it affected beyond recognition! Outrageous plots, outlandish gimmicks and putrid puns had taken the place of intelligent writing, and as the Batman phenomenon were thin with the public, sales of comics fell off. As entire comics groups vanished, the survivors desperately searched for viable concepts.

Tower Comics faded from the scene. Charlton and Radio Comics cancelled en masses. Over two dozen titles vanished from the newsstands during the year 1967. The overall outlook hadn't been so bleak since the end of World War II, when almost all superhero titles gave up the ghost and perished. The remaining companies utilized differing methods to remain afloat in the Sargasso Sea of Comics.

Marvel didn't even break stride, as the company policy of continuing plots and sub-plots became magnified into multi-part epics such as "SHIELD vs. the Yellow Claw" or "Dr. Doom and the Power Cosmic" (***STRANGE TALES*** #160-167, ***FANTASTIC FOUR*** #57-60). New talent such as Jim Steranko and returning veterans like John Buscema helped ease the workload for Jack Kirby, while Roy Thomas became Marvel's second regular writer with Stan Lee remaining the primary scribe. Between the influx of new blood and the opportunity for the old pros to slow down slightly, Marvel produced what could be considered the best overall lineup of titles since the EC days. Every book was consistently well-written and well-illustrated. Continuity between the different titles was nothing short of unnerving. (When Captain America battled the Red Skull, not only did he keep his teammates in ***THE AVENGERS*** appraised of the situation, but they, in turn, contacted S.H.I.E.L.D. in ***STRANGE TALES*** to keep Nick Fury updated. (And to let Hawkeye talk to the Black Widow, no doubt!)

Each book had its own flavor, its own style of character interplay and plotting that made it unique. The titles with two strips in each offered rather bizarre contrasts in terms of tone and content. ***STRANGE TALES*** split the billing between Nick Fury, a hard-bitten two-fisted semi-secret agent who headed S.H.I.E.L.D. and whose strip was illustrated in a highly technically-oriented style by Kirby and Steranko, and Doctor Strange, a magician entrusted with the safeguarding of Earth by the Ancient One (drawn by artists Steve Ditko and Marie Severin, who specialized in rendering other dimensions that resembled settings for nightmares). One could almost imagine Nick Fury peeking into the other half of the book and snickering at the good doctor's garb while Dr. Strange sneered at the muscle-bound agent's

THE LEGION OF SHOOTER-HEROES

by Bob Seron

THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES originally was—and, equally so, was not—a part of DC's resurgence in the late 1950's. The group debuted in the April, 1958, ***ADVENTURE COMICS***, but it was intended as a one-shot. In a phenomenon not unlike that which surrounded Howard the Duck more recently, reader response eventually gave it the back feature in ***ADVENTURE***—and eventually the group was given the feature spot, with ***ADVENTURE***'s former lead feature star, Superboy, only another member.

Most people, generally, consider the prime period of the Legion to be the first series of stories written by Jim Shooter, starting with ***ADVENTURE*** #346 and ending with ***ACTION*** #384—a span of 3½ years.

Why? That isn't a question easily answered. Members of ***Interloc*** (the remnant of the Legion Fan Club started in the early '70's) have puzzled it over for the past four years. Many people have many answers, but there seems to be no single overriding aspect. One virtue of the strip was its tendency toward change. In his first story, Shooter introduced four new Legionnaires: Princess Projectra of Orando, an illusionist; Nemesis Kid of Myar, who could defeat any one foe in battle; Ferro Lad of Earth, who could turn to iron at will; and Karate Kid, also of Earth, who had finely-developed combat skills. Nemesis Kid was a traitor (and was expelled in the next issue); not long after, Shooter killed off Ferro Lad—who, in his short existence, became one of the series' most sympathetic characters. Shooter introduced the Legion's most deadly foes, the Fatal Five: he outlawed the group; he created the group's most sinister nemeses, the Dark Circle; he destroyed the original clubhouse. It is arguable that the Legion under Shooter was DC's most Marvel-like comic at the time—at a time when this was actually a benefit.

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(Change was not exclusively Shooter's domain, however: for instance, Lightning Lad lost an arm early on, and soon after, Star Boy was expelled for murder.)

What was probably a greater factor in the series' popularity was the characterization Shooter gave the group and its members. It's trendy—and not altogether incorrect—to say that these days all the members look the same, talk the same, and act the same. Quite aside from the question of whether the series is currently well-written, the ostensible sameness is attributable to the fact that you're dealing with a group reacting to certain events. There aren't all that many ways they can react when super-villains crash through the inertron walls of the Legion complex. (Admittedly, the most realistic reaction is probably, "Not **again**!")

Shooter got around this problem, for the most part, by using smaller groups of Legionnaires—and, when the problem got too big for a small group, it was generally handled by two or three small groups. Once in a while, the story would not be hero vs. villain, but rather one of the heroes dealing with a personal problem; that allowed for yet more individual attention.

One thing the Legionnaires all had was heroism—but it was shown in many different ways, each member being shown as someone able to overcome a weakness. For instance, when Lighting Lad lost his arm, he didn't lose his confidence; he continued to be

Continued on page 36

over-dependency on gadgets and physical violence...!

New characters popped up right and left to fill the ranks of Marvel's supporting cast list. Yet, despite the profusion of heroes and villains, ***not one title was added or cancelled during the entire year!*** With only ten original titles (a total of of thirteen different strips!) on the market, Marvel set standards that none (including themselves) have matched since.

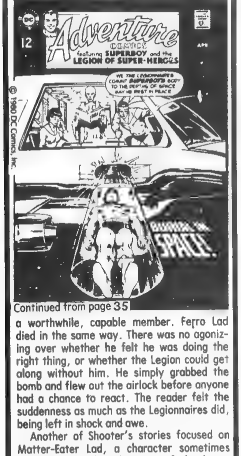
Meanwhile...

DC continued its policy of reviving old characters, as Plastic Man and the Spectre received their own books. Plastic Man was but a shadow of his old amusing self, and died within a year of lack of quality. (Ahem) The Spectre changed formats every couple of issues going from magician, to super-powered ghost, to host for a selection of short stories. He gave up the ghost (as it were) after a year and a half of continual alteration.

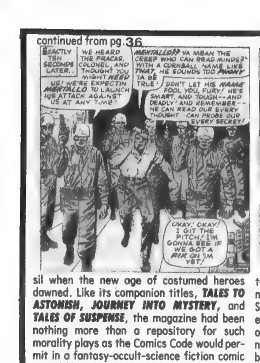
STRANGE ADVENTURES picked up another ghostly hero and turned him into a cult classic. Under the talented pen of newcomer Neal Adams, Deadman achieved both critical and commercial success. (Adams was one of many who had tried to save the Spectre, and failed.)

Expansion was the key word for DC. When Charlton went under, most of its staffers moved to DC, where they were given both old characters to revitalize and free rein to develop new concepts. Under Dick Giordano's editorship, the ***BLACKHAWK*** and ***AQUAMAN*** books received new creative staffs while Steve Ditko conceived two of the most unusual series ever: ***BEWARE THE CREEPER*** and ***HAWK AND DOVE***. Both books had one-issue tryouts in ***SHOWCASE*** and went immediately into their own titles. (A rather surprising move for the usually cautious DC line. It wasn't unique for a character to go through a three or four issue tryout before being granted a strip, much less a book!)

To digress for a moment; before DC and Marvel became near-carbon copies of each other, each house had a style and a reputation of its own. DC was the old, established publisher, better known to the world at large because it was the only surviving line of books


Adventure Comics
12
featuring SUPERBOY and the LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES
APR
WE, THE LEGIONNAIRES, CLAIM SUPERBOY'S SOX TO THE DEPTHS OF SPACE AND BID THEM FARE-THEE-WELL!
SPHEEE...
SPHEEE...
SPHEEE...

continued from pg. 36


EXACTLY TEN SECONDS LATER...
WE HEARD THE PEACE, COLONEL, AND THOUGHT YOU WOULD WANT TO KNOW!
WE'VE INTERCEPTED MISSILES TO LAUNCH HER ATTACK AGAINST US AT ANY TIME
ABSOLUTELY! YA MEAN THE CREEP WHO CAN READ MINDS? WITH A CEREBRAL WAVE LIKE THAT, HE SOUNDS TOO SMART!
DON'T LET HIS MASKS AND MAGIC FOOL YA, SON! HE'S SMART, AND TOUGH -- AND DEADLY! AND REMEMBER -- HE CAN READ OUR EVERY THOUGHT! CAN PROBE OUR EVERY SECRET!
OKAY! OKAY! I'LL BITCH THIS GONNA BEE IF WE DON'T RIK ON YA YET!

WHAT'S SHAKIN', DOC? WHATCHA DOIN' WITH THAT KIRB-O-TRU TINKER-TOY YEH
THIS HAPPENS TO BE AN AUTOMATIC ENCEPHALOGRAM-INDUCER, FOR CYBERNETIC VISUALIZATION!
AIN'T THAT DUCKY! NOW RUN THIS ... I MEAN IT'S IN EMOS/SHAPE!
I'M STARK'S TRANSISTORIZED INNOVATION, COLONEL!

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sil when the new age of costumed heroes dawned. Like its companion titles, ***TALES TO ASTONISH***, ***JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY***, and ***TALES OF SUSPENSE***, the magazine had been nothing more than a repository for such morality plays as the Comics Code would permit in a fantasy-occult-science fiction comic—and like them all, it underwent a facelift as soon as the new fad for super-heroes looked like it was here to stay. The first move, typically enough, was to introduce a popular extrovert to the line-up. Thus, issue #101 saw the adventures of The Human Torch shoe-horned into the lead spot. Jack Kirby drew the feature, of course, and it presented a peculiar contrast with the Steve Ditko-drawn aliens and extra-dimensional menaces which continued to occupy the back pages of the book.

The costumed hero trend showed no signs of letting up and monsters were not selling well, so by issue #110 of ***STRANGE TALES***, a new character appeared in the back of the book on a trial basis. Drawn by Steve Ditko, this new hero was Doctor Strange, named after the title which harbored him. He was a vaguely Chinese-looking magician who practised an esoteric form of occultism unlike any known on Earth. In years to come it came to be called "Vishantism" after three of its chief deities, but back in 1963 it was just... real... ***stuk-RANGE***. To author Stan Lee's eternal credit, he was able to shift gears effortlessly, going from the slangy teenage Kirby-drawn Torch stories to the almost Victorian formality of Ditko's Doctor Strange world without so much as blinking an eye. The art styles, the plots, the very FEEL of the two features were as different as night and day—but Stan made them each as believable as possible. Readers who sat through this split-personality trick ended up confused and awe-struck. It took a special kind of fan to make it through the ***STRANGE TALES*** double feature in one piece.

Apparently, however, the nation harboured quite a number of such hardy souls, for after a two-issue trial and an absence of two issues, ***"Doctor Strange"*** was back to stay. Lee's scripting rose to new heights of esoteric alliteration as Ditko found his artistic footing on the unstable lumps of matter which floated through the "interdimensional voids" where much of the action was set. Doctor Strange's Chinese look was replaced by a Richard Boone-like cragginess and he was pitted against an unimaginable array of occult foes. The backgrounds, always full of creepy shadows and outre angle shots, became progressively more and more decorative. Burning braziers, cobwebbed corners, leering masks on paisley walls, a curiously carved three-legged table, a circular window with four curved bars, pre-Atlantean statuary, and a floor plan which never stood still from one issue to the next gave Strange's house, the Sanctum Sanctorum, a personality all its own. The Doctor himself was often

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UNLESS I CAN SHATTER THIS WEB OF WONDERMENT, ALL IS LOST! MY MISSION WILL BE FORGOTTEN -- I WILL BE DOOMED TO A LIFE OF AIMLESS IMAGERY!
EVEN IN A COMA, HOVERING ON THE BRINK OF DEATH! -- THE POWER OF THE ANCIENT ONE IS VIRTUALLY BEYOND BELIEF!

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creators did an excellent job of providing an origin and characterization for the ready-made hero. The book lasted only five issues, but it was one of the highlights of the year.

HAWK AND DOVE took the eternal concept of militarism versus pacifism and personified it in two brothers who were given the ability (through the intervention of an unseen voice) to change into costumed versions of their beliefs. While the Hawk would duke it out with felons, (and usually get trashed in the process), the Dove would try to talk his foes out of their evil ways, and, having failed at that, attempt to utilize his enemies' abilities against themselves. Perhaps the most important aspect of this series

JUST THINK...
BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT INSIDE THE STATUS, LOOK!
THEY HEAR YOU ALL RIGHT, BOMBA.
SUFFERING SHARKS, TIH-THEN WHAT'S MOVING THE STATUE?!

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was that neither the Hawk nor the Dove was ever proven to be totally correct in his beliefs. Sometimes nonviolence would carry the day, sometimes mayhem would win. It was up to the reader to decide which was the "correct" viewpoint. Six issues of this semi-psychodrama were produced by Steve Ditko and Gil Kane before bad sales brought about an underserved demise.

Since DC couldn't get the rights to Tarzan, they decided to do the next best thing and utilize another jungle hero. Why they chose to use a defunct TV series as the basis may never be known, but the ***BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY*** book, spurred on by bland Jack Sparling art, soon followed its video predecessor into oblivion.

Steve Ditko's proclivity for heroes with an almost mystical ability to change from hero to civilian led him to create ***THE CREEPER***. Like his other

continued from pg. 37

shown from the back, the deep folds of his blood-red cloak obscuring his features. "Spectral doorways" would open in the middle of the air and he would be swept across space, time and the "nether zones" to unnamed dimensions where Nazi-like sorcerors plotted the annexation of Earth as they sat on floating thrones amidst a welter of brightly colored lattices, snake fangs, planetoids, geometric forms, and cowering slaves.

Meanwhile, back in the front of the book, life went on as usual. The Thing joined the Torch as a permanent companion in issue #124 and the two had plenty of slam-bang action adventures with a variety of foes. The art was handled by a number of Kirby imitators when the "King" became too busy to pencil it personally. Even such a unique stylist as Bob Powell, a respected Golden Age artist with a very un-Kirby-like approach, was made to fit into the ordained mold for the duration of his stint on the series. Reader reaction to the Thing-Torch team-ups was mixed, however. Many seemed to think that the plots were not sufficiently earth-shattering when compared with the same characters' appearances in the pages of the ***FANTASTIC FOUR***. With issue #135 (cover-dated August 1965), a new lead feature was introduced—***"Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D."*** Presented as a modern-day chronicle of Marvel's perpetual World War Two hero, Sgt. Fury, the new series was an obvious spin-off of the then-wildly-popular James Bond books and movies. It was at this precise moment that the ideological and artistic dichotomy of the entire Marvel line achieved it ultimate expression.

To understand this, one must look at certain world events of the period. In late 1964 the first readily available commercial sources of LSD-25 were established on the West Coast. By the spring of 1965 the drug, then still legal, was being hailed as a wonder-cure for schizophrenia as well as a serious tool for psychic research. The powerful hallucinogen was being experimented with by doctors, students, psychiatrists, and psychologists from coast to coast. Not yet labeled "hippies," the drug experimenters found themselves intrigued by the parallels between the LSD visions they were studying and a long historical tradition of occult religion, esoteric magic and oriental (particularly Tibetan) meditation. Gradually the recreational uses of the hallucinogens became evident and they were adopted by the bohemian intellectual element of society which also was involved in serious political and social reform. Still not "drop-outs" or "flower children," these academics and radicals often were members of "ban the bomb" or anti-draft organizations. Long before the rest of the country became aware of the problem, they were discussing America's covert presence in Viet Nam. They distrusted the CIA, the FBI and the military-industrial complex. As the summer of 1965 arrived, many of the drug-taking students began to cut their

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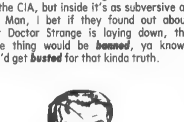
ties with college and society, hitch-hiking around the country, letting their hair grow, and, yes, reading Marvel comics.

It isn't hard to guess that these people liked Ditko's alienated ***SPIDER-MAN*** better than Kirby's well-adjusted ***FANTASTIC FOUR***. But above all, the comic feature they loved was the esoteric ***"Doctor Strange."*** He had been trained in Tibet, after all, and he could be seen sitting under that crazy window at night, staring into a faceted purple gem. Spaced out. Completely laid back, man.

The letters page, aptly titled "Strange Mails," began to blossom with cryptic messages from people who were probably reading more into the magazine than was intended. Of note is a letter from "Camay Sar," a student at Columbia University who wrote (in ***STRANGE TALES*** #145) "An interest in subjects tangential to the whole of page 6 of ***STRANGE TALES*** #137 has also crossed our path. (And we are not thinking of 'art nouveau' design either!)"—the page in question refering specifically to Doctor Strange's "hallucinations" and his need to "return to reality" or "be doomed to a life of aimless imagery." It is unlikely that Stan Lee knew what was intended by the reader who playfully gave his address as the "Hotel Cyttorak" in Bombay, India—but the cognescenti understood—Cyttorak was yet another of those colorful hallucinogenic dimensions and Bombay was a good place to score weed at the time. The comic became a cult fad among drug users, many of whom were convinced that Ditko, if not Lee, was one of them. And wasn't it funny how Doctor Strange appeared in the back of ***STRANGE TALES***, just like the whole thing was supposed to be kinda, you know man, ***secret*** or something? Like, wasn't it Herman Hesse who said, "Magic theatre—not for everyone!" Can ya dig it? Like, on the ***surface***, it's this whole weird thing about Nick Fury and the CIA, but inside it's as subversive as hell. Man, I bet if they found out about what Doctor Strange is laying down, the whole thing would be ***banned***, ya know? They'd get ***busted*** for that kinda truth.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Of course, for every wild-eyed marijuana-smoking tripster who read ***STRANGE TALES*** for the extra-dimensional visions it evoked, there were an equal number who bought the title because they liked the hard-hitting 007 convolutions of Nick Fury's adventures. (I wouldn't know—I wasn't one of 'em.) A look at the letters pages shows they were a surly lot, constantly demanding that Doctor Strange be removed because they either did not like the art or they couldn't understand the stories. A climactic battle scene consisting of two men looking each other in the eyes until one of them succumbed wasn't their idea of Clobbering Time.

And yet it all made sense—there was Stan Lee, writing "Soap Box" oratory about brotherhood and the perils of prejudice—and there, in ***STRANGE TALES***, we could see the lion laying down with the lamb. It was too good to last—and it didn't. The first crack came when Steve Ditko suddenly quit Marvel. His last issue of ***STRANGE TALES*** was number #146, appropriately entitled ***"The End at Last!"*** He was replaced by Bill Everett, creator of The Sub-Mariner, Marvel's only major non-Ditko/Lee hero (excluding Kirby's Silver Surfer, who was only introduced two months before the last Ditko-drawn Marvels saw print). Everett did a creditable job of submerging his own style to in an attempt to preserve visual continuity on the Doctor's feature—probably the only time during the 1960's that an artist at Marvel was specifically told to imitate Steve Ditko. Marie Severin, who replaced him, also tried, although less directly, to maintain the artistic trademarks of the series. New scripters Denny O'Neil, Roy Thomas, Jim Lorence and Raymond Marais worked subtle shifts on the writing too, even though their intent was to hew closely to the Stan Lee style. The feature began a slow slide downward—mercifully, almost imperceptibly slow, yet inexorably downward.

The cosmic entity who observes the shifting balance in astrology comic books must have had a quiet chuckle when, after a series of artists including John Severin, Ogden Whitney, Howard Purcell and John Buscema had each taken a stab at finishing the overworked Jack Kirby's Nick Fury layouts, a relative unknown named Jim Steranko entered the scene with issue 151. After a three issue tryout of working over Kirby's roughs, Steranko took on the task of plotting (full scripting came later), pencilling, inking and coloring the feature, turning it into a graphic showcase filled with stunning examples of what had by then come to be known as "psychedelic" art. Confused Doctor Strange fans, still hating the war-like Fury message, had to admit the thing was done like nobody's business—and written as well or better than the tales of the Mystic Master. Meanwhile the Drug Culture was upon us in all its chaotic splendour and the popularity of Doctor Strange was greater than ever, even though the strip itself had

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fallen into the somewhat pedestrian hands of Dan Adkins.

Events in America continued to echo what was going on in the comic—the split between the anti-war "doves" and the pro-war "hawks" had reached the point of actual physical violence—and both sides were becoming more vociferous and self-righteous. Nick Fury and Doctor Strange began to alternate on the covers of ***STRANGE TALES*** and by issue 162 they began to alternate the lead spot in the interior as well, removing forever the esoteric cachet that being the perpetual back-up had given the Doctor Strange series. The letters page resounded with the pros and cons of militarism versus mysticism as 1968 dawned. And finally, because the title was selling so well—and in answer to the requests of intolerant readers on both sides of the ideological fence—***STRANGE TALES*** was split in two. ***DOCTOR STRANGE*** continued to bear the numbering of its predecessor, commencing its run with number 169 and ***NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD*** was given a new start with a more conventional number 1 issue.

The dichotomy had been disposed of. Henceforth all the weirdos could read ***DOCTOR STRANGE*** and all the straights could read ***NICK FURY***. Theoretically everyone would be pleased as punch. Unfortunately, it didn't quite work that way. Apparently the world didn't have quite enough comic-book-buying weirdos to support Doctor Strange in his own title and the Nick Fury fans were dropping away in droves as the James Bond fad faded into oblivion. The supreme irony was that both of the new titles terminated after exactly fifteen issues. For the mystic Doctor Strange and the militaristic Nick Fury it had been hang together or hang separately—and their cancellations in 1969 pointed out better than any of Stan Lee's Soap Boxes ever had the value of co-operation, tolerance and brotherhood. •

creations (***THE QUESTION*** and ***HAWK & DOVE***) Ditko's Creeper could change from his natural state to an eerie, skittering being who frightened his foes through a pose of maddness.

With DC experimenting in search of a new image and Marvel remaining basically the same, 1968 dawned as the beginning of a hopeful era for the comics field. Unfortunately, it was not to be that way...

The first sign that things were going bad was the mass cancellation of all of DC's new titles as well as some of the older ones.

BLACKHAWK finally bit the dust. Even a return to the blue-uniformed soldiers-of-fortune motif failed to stop flagging sales. (For awhile, the seven middle-aged heroes adapted various weapons into costumes to become super-heroes!)

BOMBA, CAPTAIN ACTION, THE GEEK, ANTHRO, HAWK & DOVE, and ***BEWARE... THE CREEPER*** were all axed.

The main series such as ***SUPERMAN, BATMAN,*** and ***WONDER WOMAN*** were all suffering from plot stagnation. Signs of change were apparent in ***BATMAN*** as Neal Adams became DC's regular cover artist, and started presenting the Caped Crusader as a mysterious persona, rather than a costumed clown.

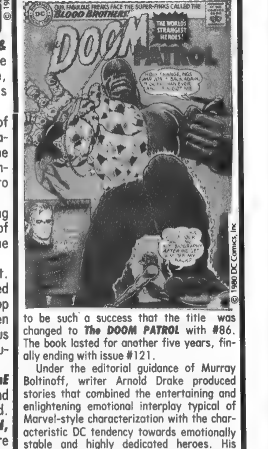
Superman had become dependent on Kryptonite and Imaginary Stories, neither of which was being handled in a particularly original fashion.

LOVE THAT DOOM PATROL!!

by Donna Ugol

During the Silver Age, Marvel and DC exhibited markedly different house styles in their super-hero books. Marvel's new trick of giving increased space to characterization through the means of sub-plots was the most noticeable difference. One DC book, ***THE DOOM PATROL***, copied this particular trick while retaining elements of the DC house style, especially the emphasis on tight plotting and story structure. The result was freakish and excellent.

The series originally began in ***MY GREATEST ADVENTURE*** #80 (June, 1963). It proved



to be such a success that the title was changed to ***The DOOM PATROL*** with #86. The book lasted for another five years, finally ending with issue #121.

Under the editorial guidance of Murray Boltinoff, writer Arnold Drake produced stories that combined the entertaining and enlightening emotional interplay typical of Marvel-style characterization with the characteristic DC tendency towards emotionally stable and highly dedicated heroes. His characters, a band of super-powered freaks, exhibited both the mutual respect of fellow professionals typical of DC ***and*** the humorous persiflage of the Marvel groups. Drake played up individual character development; he expended considerable energy and space on the subtle shifts in relationships between the heroes (and some of the villains), often reducing the ***de rigeur*** fight scene to a few pages. Indeed, towards the end of its run, ***THE DOOM PATROL***'s ever-spiraling subplots, which included a schizophrenic love-

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hate relationship between the DP's leader and one of their arch-enemies, marital difficulties between DP member Rita Farr (Elasti-Girl) and their sometime-ally Steve Dayton (an egocentric multi-billionaire and part-time super-hero, Mento), and a court battle for the custody of Gar Logan (teen-age part-time super-hero, Beast Boy, and full-time obnoxious twerp), threatened to take the book over completely.

The Doom Patrol had four main characters: Niles Caulder (the Chief), Rita Farr (Elasti-Girl), Cliff Steele (Robotman), and Larry Trainor (Negative Man). Caulder, the "brain" of the group, was a crippled scientific genuis and the other three were super-powered freaks. Before the accidents that gave them super-human abilities, Rita, Cliff, and Larry were adventurous individuals who derived emotional satisfaction from their professional success (Rita was an actress and athlete who did her own stunts, Cliff was a professional sportsman and race car driver, Larry was a test pilot). After their accidents, they all suffered from the deprivation of losing their jobs, and the worse pain of being shunned as freaks. It was then that Caulder brought them together with the twin lures of greater adventures than they had known before and the chance to prove that "freaks" are worthy people. (This followed the DC tradition of superior people having super-powers and implicitly assuming the responsibility to use those powers for societal good, rather than the Marvel style of ordinary people gaining super-powers and being forced by circumstance to recognize that "with great power comes great responsibility.").

Drake drew inspiration from the alienating aspects of his characters' condition and, instead of focusing on the traditional conflicts between the super-heroes and their villains, emphasized the DP's attempts to both justify their freakish existence by doing "good work" and to live normal lives of their own. Barred from normal societal intercourse, Robotman and Negative Man, and, to a lesser extent, Elasti-Girl and The Chief, were forced to create their own family setting within the confines of the group itself. Eventually Elasti-Girl and The Chief, seemingly more normal in appearance, established contacts and relationships outside the group which precipitated a series of group conflicts and tensions.

Indeed Drake transformed the book from a typical super-hero title into a book with a very unusual theme (for comics): the struggles of the socially alienated to re-establish contacts with human society. The constant struggles of Negative Man and Robotman to re-affirm their humanity in the face of their physical transformations into things unhuman won an instant emotional response and considerable empathy from the often-times highly introverted comics reader. Elasti-Girl summed up the book's theme in issue #117 when she said, "We didn't set out just to fight baddies! We also wanted to prove that 'freaks' like we can be valuable to the world! And, by example, to help every outcast! Well, we made it. We gave some hope to every gimpy, hare-lipped, fat, four-eyed kid in the world!"

The artwork by Bruno Premiani echoed Drake's pre-occupation with characterization. His subdued art style emphasized semi-photographic realism. His figures were neither idealized nor exaggerated. This handling of the visuals tended to shift readers' attention away from the backgrounds (no startling machinery or stunning space scenes here!) or monsters (which often looked pudgy and cute rather than menacing due to Premiani's insistence on "realistic" proportions and anatomy) and back towards the characters. The understated art never detracted from the dialogue and the reader was forced to suffer through Drake's bad jokes and puns.

YOUR EFFORTS ARE USELESS! THE EARTH SHALL DIE IN 17 MINUTES!
WAIT! WE MUST SPEAK TO YOU! WE UNDERSTAND YOUR PROBLEM— YOU ARE STRANGELY DIFFERENT, AND SO THE WORLD REJECTS YOU!
BUT WE—THE DOOM PATROL—WE WERE OUTCASTS TOO! THEN A GREAT MAN SHOWED US HOW TO BE ACCEPTED BY THE WORLD AGAIN!
HIS APPLICATION TO US, ELASTIC WOMAN! WE WILL ALWAYS BE WALKING HORRORS TO NORMAL MEN! LET THEM BE THEIR
© 1969 DC Comics, Inc.

Even in its last issue ***THE DOOM PATROL*** retained its character-oriented focus. Declining sales had forced the series' cancellation and an editorial decision was made to end it with a big bang. End the series they did, for Elasti-Girl, Robotman, The Chief, and Negative Man were all seemingly destroyed by an atomic blast in issue #121, while in pursuit of their arch foes, The Brotherhood of Evil. But even in death the Doom Patrol was handled with a twist. Instead of heroically sacrificing themselves to save the whole Earth from destruction, the DP members chose to die in order to save a small insignificant New England fishing town with a population of 14. Outcasts, excluded from normal human contact, the Doom Patrol still believed strongly enough in the worth of *all* human beings that they considered their lives to be worth less than the lives of 14 insignificant strangers. DC never gave us more inspirational heroes than ***The Doom Patrol,*** the inhuman group that reaffirmed the value of human life. ●

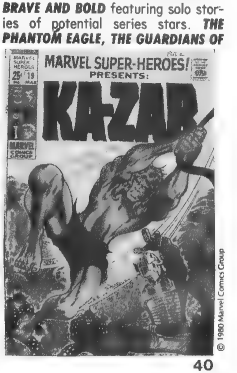
The entire remaining line was about to undergo a massive facelift and re-organization, but that wouldn't end until 1970. At present, they were slowly slipping from the Number 1 slot as Marvel started expanding their lineup.

It was to prove to be a major mistake for Marvel.

The powers-that-be decided to take the split-books and spin off all the strips into their own titles. ***TALES OF SUSPENSE*** became ***CAPTAIN AMERICA*** as ***IRON MAN*** started to take over from #1, as did ***SUB-MARINER,*** after ***THE INCREDIBLE HULK*** took ***TALES TO ASTONISH***'s numbering. ***STRANGE TALES*** simply dropped "Tales" and added "Doctor" to become ***DOCTOR STRANGE*** while Nick Fury had to start over in his own title all over again.

CAPTAIN MARVEL, an officer in the Kree Spacefleet working undercover on Earth was granted his own book after only two appearances in ***MARVEL SUPERHEROES*** as the first new-material feature in that book. The chronicles of Marvel's books alone would take a long article to explain, but suffice it to say that after four exceptional issues the book sank to new lows until just before its cancellation, when Gil Kane and Roy Thomas would take the character and make it work.

MARVEL SUPER-HEROES became Marvel's answer to ***SHOWCASE*** and ***BRAVE AND BOLD*** featuring solo stories of potential series stars. ***THE PHANTOM EAGLE, THE GUARDIANS OF***



THE GALAXY, DOCTOR DOOM, KAZAR, MEDUSA, and ***THE BLACK KNIGHT*** all made appearances, but none received their own books without considerable revamping.

While all the new books kept popping up, the established titles weren't idle. Hank Pym changed yet again, this time back to Ant-Man. Nick Fury concluded his battle with the Yellow Claw, only to discover he had been battling androids (secretly built by Doctor Doom). The life of Professor X, the leader of the X-Men, was sacrificed to save humanity. (This plot was to be revealed as a hoax a couple of years later!)

At the point when they expanded their lineup, Marvel changed their policy on art. Original art, normally done twice printed size was henceforth done only 1½ times printed size. The artists, already trying to handle the enlarged workload, were pressured even further by the fact that they had to work in a more detailed style to compensate for the lost detail that the original size entailed. With all these factors, the once normally stable art teams started playing musical books, switching assignments on an almost monthly basis. Only the ever-prolific Jack Kirby and John Buscema seemed able to maintain their schedules as people like Don Heck, Gene Colan and Dick Ayers traded off books as lack of time or interest caused their work to suffer. The overall quality of the line began to suffer as material that really shouldn't have seen print was published because of a lack of time. It was a process that, once started, couldn't be halted.

Since 1968 there have been bright spots in the field, but the field itself has grown stagnant, with imitators of artists and writers flourishing rather than creators with their own styles developing to the best of their abilities. There hasn't been an equivalent period to the Silver Age since then, just scattered gleamings amongst the dregs.

In a sense, it's ironic. DC's decline was marked by massive cancellations. Marvel's decline was heralded by its first major expansion since its start.

Perhaps there's a moral in there, somewhere.

Perhaps not. ●

ATOM BEFORE THE FALL (AT CHARLTON)

by Steve Cohen

To readers today Charlton comics is the epitome of a third-rate comics company. Forced several years ago to discontinue their new material books, Charlton is currently represented by a mere handful of dull reprint titles. But what the new comics reader doesn't know (and probably would never know unless someone told him) is that at one time during the Silver Age, Charlton was one of the industry's most experimental and exciting companies. During the middle and late '60's, editor Dick Giordano ushered in a mini-Golden Age for Charlton and transformed its line of highly derivative superheroes and genre books into titles characterized by inventive and playful art and bizarre storylines. Best of all, Giordano had the inspiration to hire Steve Ditko full-time after he left Marvel—which led to the dramatic entry into the Charlton line of the revised ***CAPTAIN ATOM***.

Ditko's work previous to his departure from Marvel seemed to emphasize one style or the other; he never seemed to be assigned to a strip that combined both action and bizarre effects (This is not to suggest that no one instance of Ditko's Marvel work didn't exhibit both of the elements that made him so popular. Indeed ***SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL #2***, which teamed up Spider-man and Dr. Strange, is probably one of the most explicit examples of how both of Ditko's strengths could be combined to create an almost overpowering comic.) Ditko's two super-hero assignments at Charlton, ***CAPTAIN ATOM*** and ***THE BLUE BEETLE***, however, demanded just such a joint approach for the artwork.

In 1965 during the heyday of the Silver Age Superhero Revival, Charlton printed some of the old Captain Atom stories in the back of ***STRANGE SUSPENSE STORIES***, starting with #75. The reprints evidently improved sales of the book because with #78 new Captain Atom material appeared. These new Captain Atom stories might not have seemed too different from the old ones on the surface—after all, Steve Ditko was again doing the pencils—but the storylines were dramatically changed by the new scripter Joe Gill. Gone was the emphasis on combatting earthbound saboteurs; Captain Atom was thrown against a series of eerie super-villains equipped either with futuristic weaponry or dangerous powers.

This sudden change in story focus allowed Ditko to unleash all his skills. Ditko's characters fell into bizarre contortions that lacked anatimical accuracy but radiated power and movement. In addition to this exercise in the depiction of violence, Ditko also took advantage of Captain Atom's light and radiation powers to create stunning special effects that had not been seen before out-side of ***"DOCTOR STRANGE."*** The artwork was simple, yet riddled with effects: Captain Atom's flight trail was a residue of shimmering stars; His body often radiated nuclear energy in the shape of an atomic symbol; Lightning bolts flew from his hands and his foes tossed him into other dimensions or blasted him with odd energy blasts. The end result of this surreal, yet violent, art style was that Captain Atom's conventional plots and straightforward fight scenes achieved a potency that would otherwise have been lacking.

CAPTAIN ATOM, like all superhero titles, went through several changes during its two-year run. A major costume change, redefinition of powers and a new returning arch enemy, The Ghost, all added zest to the title. A new scripter, former fan David A. Kaler, resulted in slightly snappier dialogue a la the Marvel style. Unfortunately, many of these changes came too late to reverse a declining sales spiral. ***CAPTAIN ATOM*** was cancelled in 1967.

But his legacy lives on even in today's more sophisticated comics. The first of the "Cosmic" space-oriented characters, Captain Atom paved the way for Warlock and Captain Marvel. Many of the character schticks (the starry flight trail, the distinctive costumes, and the inventive action-cum-special-effects art/style) that made the major Charlton super-hero so distinctive in the '60's are still with us today (albeit exhibited by other characters). ●

THEY PAUSE ONLY A SECOND TO CATCH THEIR BREATH, THEN...
YOU TAKE THE BASTER; I'LL HANDLE THE SPEEDY!
I'LL GET HIM THIS TIME!
WHAT? YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE DEAD!
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THE BAND THAT TIME FORGOT

by Murray R. Ward

At times, in their total exuberance for the super-hero, the majority of comic fans tend to forget the existence of every other genre of comic books. In recent years, this phenomenon has even extended to the point where fans, especially the younger fans, tend to think of the Marvel and DC super-hero lines as all the comics in the world. However, just as there are comics which are not published by either Marvel or DC, so are there also comics which are not about costumed, super-powered champions of justice.

What wise guy said, "Who cares?"

Well, the profit in becoming and remaining aware of the non-hero genres within the comics field can be seen by examining those groups, or sub-groups, of fans who ***have*** remained thus aware. One of these is, of course, the older fan; another is the dealer. The older fan has seen it all and done it all; he longs for the different, and thus investigates those comics whose subject matter had previously been supposedly "beneath" his notice. The dealer, in the course of his business, gets "stuck" with a lot of seemingly unsaleable comics, which are a part of any large collection purchasing transaction. His problem is to make the unsaleable saleable, not to say valuable; and we have all seen how the articles in recent years in the ***COMIC BOOK PRICE GUIDE*** on such topics as "good girl art" and "esoteric" comics have helped him to do so. (The latter has resulted in the loss of the original meaning of the word "esoteric," just as comic historians have misplaced the meaning of the term "continuity.") The lesson to be learned by watching the older fan is that there may be gold beneath the dross, so to speak—that is, one may be missing out on some good comics and not knowing it, simply because of an ingrained or even unconscious prejudice. The lesson to be learned from the dealer is more subtle: one cannot accurately keep track of the super-hero scene without at least ***some*** knowledge of the other types of comics being published. For example, to quote the author of a years-past ***"WONDERFUL WORLD OF (DC) COMICS"*** column, "Who ever heard of Jay Scott Pike?" Apparently, nobody in fandom had, until Pike drew the tryout ***"DOLPHIN"*** strip which appeared in ***SHOWCASE #*** 79. Why? Because, up to that point, Jay Scott Pike had drawn mainly romance comics, and as the article went on to point out, no self-respecting (male) comics fan would be caught dead with a romance comic (in the late 60's, anyway; nowadays, the fans still don't read 'em, but some grab the back issues which have become worth money). Similarly, had John Romita not returned to Marvel in 1966 to draw ***DAREDEVIL*** and ***SPIDER-MAN***, fandom might well have presumed his comic art career to have ended with his ***CAPTAIN AMERICA*** efforts of over a decade before, since in the interim he too had busied himself largely with romance comics. Gene Colan drew mystery and monster stories aplenty for Atlas (Marvel) in the late 50's and early 60's, as well as DC Romance comics; who among us guessed who hid behind the pseudonym of Adam Austin when he began applying his talents to the ***"SUB-MARINER"*** and ***"IRON MAN"*** strips in 1965? And if he did not perform such other endeavors as founding an art school and drawing the occasional SF or super-hero cover, how many would not think of even such a comics great as Joe Kubert as "that guy who did the DC war comics?"

The point is, both today and in the past, fans have tended to ignore anything in comics that didn't have super-heroes written all over it in large letters. Besides the afore mentioned romance, war, science fiction, and mystery comics (which sub-genres, I might add, have recently been given some public due in the series of DC hardcover reprint books edited by Michael Uslan), there are also the westerns. This article will devote itself to the study of at least some of those westerns.

Super-hero fans may perhaps feel they have good reason to look down upon the western comics with scorn and loathing, since, along with the war and crime comics, westerns were among the main types of comics that

WAIT A MINUTE, HAWK! DOES THAT MEAN ALL YOUR FRIENDS KNOW WHO I REALLY AM?
AH, SIMMER DOWN, TWO-GUN NOBODY GIVES A HANG, 'CEPTIN' YOU!
I KNOW IT NOT, NOR HAVE I THE WISH. A MAN'S SECRETS BE SACRED TO MY MIND.
WITHAL, THINE AVENTURE HATH LED US TO OUR FOE, HAWKEYE!
I HAVE SWORN THAT THIS BATTLE SHALL BE THE LAST 'TWEEN HIM AND US!
© 1980 Marvel Comics Group

"took over" from the super-hero titles of the '40's when they folded. At DC, for example, Green Lantern vacated ***ALL-AMERICAN COMICS*** to the likes of Johnny Thunder, a western hero (not the Thunderbolt-commanding fantastic character), and even the mighty Justice Society of America lost their home in ***ALL-STAR COMICS*** when it became ***ALL-STAR WESTERN***. In short, the westerns began at the point where the super-heroes left off. With the extreme popularity of westerns on the early television of the 1950's, with such long-running series as ***"WYATT EARP," "WANTED: DEAD OR ALIVE," "BAT MASTERSON,"*** and of course, ***GUNSMOKE,"*** to name a very few, of course the western comics had no problem in finding a ready audience. When Marvel, especially, attempted to resuscitate its western line in the early '70's, there were literally ***acres*** of old '50's material crying out to be reprinted, some in existing titles, other in their own rapidly recreated new books. Today, of course, the westerns are on a down-swing. Although the occasional revival attempt is made, as witness Marvel's new character, ***"Caleb Hammer,"*** given a tryout in ***MARVEL PREMIERE,*** the main, and almost only western hero extant is DC's long-running favorite, ***JONAH HEX.*** Jonah was spawned in the pages of DC's then-only western showcase, ***WEIRD WESTERN TALES***, nee ***ALL-STAR WESTERN*** (a reincarnation of the book that replaced the JSA's exploits), and since his creation, all DC westerns have been a result of Jonah's success. When he graduated to his own book, a new series, ***"Scalphunter,"*** was created to take over his spot in ***WEIRD WESTERN***; when that series was cancelled, ***"Scalphunter"*** moved into Jonah's book as a back-up strip; at present, as DC plans to introduce a new solo western character, that character is set to be introduced in the pages of ***JONAH HEX*** before moving on to greater things.

But what about the era in between the end of the '50's western craze and the beginning of the ***JONAH HEX*** series? Were there in fact no western comics in the 1960's, when the superheroes were in their glory?

In the words of Johnny Carson to Ed McMahon, "Not so!"

Simultaneous with the burgeoning creation of the Marvel universe of heroes such as The Fantastic Four, The Hulk, Thor, and Spiderman, there was also formulated a secondary Marvel Universe, approximately one hundred years back in time from the mainstream super-hero adventures. Here it was that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby of FF fame, together with a small staff of other artists less associated with the hero comics, set down the adventures of the Marvel western heroes. The Marvel westerns "began" in one sense at roughly the same point in "real" time as ***FANTASTIC FOUR*** #1, and continued in one form or another until very recently. Yet, the first time most comics fans became aware of these characters was in 1975, when a group of them appeared as guest-stars in a super-hero story set in the past. Writer Steve Englehart had sent the Avengers travelling through time in their battle with the future-dwelling villain, Kang the Conqueror. "Landing" in the late 1800's, they found unlikely allies in five colorful, horse-riding, gunslinging characters known as the Rawhide Kid, the Two-Gun Kid, the Ringo Kid, Kid Colt, and (just to break the monotony of all those "Kids") the Night Rider.

Long-time readers of the Marvel westerns cheered the emergence of these stalwarts from virtual anonymity. Everyone else shook their heads and murmured softly (so as not to be overheard by the cognoscenti), "Who ***are*** those masked men?"

Well, actually, only two of them were masked. Ironically, they were the two who were recognized agents of law and order: the Two-Gun Kid and the Night Rider. The others were not actual lawmen, but gunslingers, even wanted by the law, who fought on the side of right when called upon. Of the five, the Ringo Kid was the only one not a member of the "family" of Marvel western heroes of the '60's. He was rather one of those '50's characters who enjoyed a somewhat more lengthy comeback than his peers in the '70's thru the agency of reprints. Hence, his career is not a part of our study of original '60's westerns. Of the others, three had also known comic book life in the late '50's or earlier, but had been largely revamped to "become" the heroes as they now existed; only the Night Rider was a wholly original character of the '60's (for all that he was based on the 1950's Ghost Rider, about whom more later).

In the middle 1960's, just before the TV camp craze, Marvel Comics published some 17 titles, of which 9 were super-hero comics (***FANTASTIC FOUR, SPIDER-MAN, AVENGERS, DAREDEVILS, X-MEN, THOR, STRANGE TALES, TALES TO ASTONISH, TALES OF SUSPENSE***), one was a war comic (***SGT. FURY***), 4 were teen-age romance and humor titles (***MILLIE THE MODEL, MODELING WITH MILLIE, PATSY WALKER, PATSY AND HEDY***), and the remaining three were westerns (***KID COLT, OUTLAW; RAWHIDE KID;***

TWO-GUN KID). The number of teen titles was destined to shrink from that point; the super-hero and war titles would wait till 1968 to augment their line-ups even slightly. The westerns, on the other hand, added one book to their number whose first issue appeared on the stands at the close of 1966, although the series was not a long one: ***GHOST RIDER***, who would later be known as ***NIGHT RIDER***.

The Marvel westerns, as much as their super-hero and war counterparts, were fantasies. In super-hero stories, punches are thrown, buildings demolished, cities destroyed, but no one (except the occasional villain, who later returns from the dead miraculously) ever gets seriously hurt. If Spider-Man suffers a broken arm, or a supporting character is grievously injured and taken to the hospital, it is because this circumstance serves to further the plot, not because of any desire on the writer's part to reflect the results such inflicted violence would have were it to take place in the real world. As Stan Lee has put it, comics stories feature "action, not violence." If Captain America throws a punch, the result is a large-lettered sound effect, some visual pyrotechnics, and Batroc the Leaper flying head-over-heels across the room, not the busted jaw one would expect. The same applies to the war comics. Sgt. Fury and his men may swing down upon the Nazis Tarzan-fashion, holding onto ropes or cables with one hand, firing their Tommy-guns with the other, heedless of the fact that not only can no one hit his target firing in such a fashion, but to do so would result in a broken wrist for the one so firing. Germans and Japanese fall by the score to Fury and Co., but only one member of the Howling Commandos is ever killed in action in the series' long run. In the westerns, at least under Stan Lee's writing and editing aegis, again no character, not even the blackest villain, ever perished except to point up a moral or further the plot. Despite the fact that the use of firearms by the non-super-powered heroes was ***ipso facto*** part of the series concept, as in ***SGT. FURY***, the western crusaders never shot to kill, and only occasionally to wound. Their unlikely objective, believe it or not, whether in high-noon showdown or full-scale shoot-out, was to ***shoot the guns out of the hands of their adversaries!*** If that's not fantasy, what is?

Backtracking a bit, mention was made that a villain could get his final comeuppance to point out the story's moral. The operative word here is moral. Stan Lee's westerns were moral fables. His heroes were almost pacifists in the manner of today's Shang-Chi in ***MASTER OF KUNG FU***, men forced to use violence to defend themselves and their chosen way of life in a savage and untamed frontier land. They always talked before fighting, fought with the fists before shooting, and shot to scare or wound before killing. They were, in fact, far more moral in the traditional Christian cheek-turning sense than the super-heroes. While some stories reflected the

One of the more ludicrous recurring motifs in the Marvel westerns (above) and the same thing treated as it deserved (below)

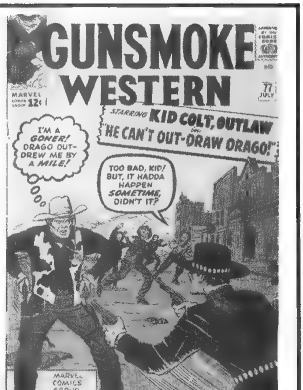
I SHALL SKILLFULLY NICK YOU IN THE BOOT-BUCKLES, AND RENDER YOU HELPLESS!
IT'S DUE TO MY SUPERB PHYSICAL CONDITION, GOT FROM BUMMIN' THE WEST FOR TWENTY YEARS!
HAW! AH BEEN BUMMIN' AROUND LONGER N ANY OTHUH!
HEY--RAWHEAD, HOW'D YOU DUCK MY BULLETS?
AN CAN PEE-BET THE BULLETS A TH' SPUR!
DEFECTIVE 66 SIGHT MECHANISM
BLAM!
BLAM!
BLAM!

Fantastic Four's ideal that "we must use this great power we have been given to benefit humanity," or more often, Spider-Man's oft-repeated lesson that "with great power there must come great responsibility," a more frequent theme was that of the warrior who longed to "hang up his guns" and live a normal life of peace, complete with the ordinary man's expected rewards of wife and children.

The first of these noble warriors of the West was ***KID COLT***. Although he began as a regular, concurrent with the DC westerns of the late '40's, his first issue bearing an August 1948 cover date, he only became the character familiar to most readers at the beginning of the Marvel Age in the '60's. Issue #103 of ***KID COLT OUTLAW*** (original title: ***KID COLT HERO OF THE WEST***) in 1961 came out at roughly the same time as the first issue of ***FANTASTIC FOUR*** and was the first to bear the Marvel, rather than the Atlas, imprint. Gradually, over the several issues preceding it, the saga of the "new" Kid Colt evolved. The accepted origin story of the Kid appeared in #79, but it was only over the space of several years that his book changed from an anthology of short stories, to the regular Marvel western format of one long story of the title character each issue, followed by a five-page short featuring no continuing characters. (These back-up tales, even more so than the main stories, were moral fables in a western setting. The lack of a continuing hero in these stories allowed Lee, Kirby and other writers to tell stories that could never happen to their main characters, who must basically survive unchanged from one adventure to the next.)

According to the origin tale, Blaine "Kid" Colt was the son of Daniel Colt, a prominent rancher in Abilene, Wyoming in the mid-1800's. Tall, strong, and a master horseman, the younger Colt refuses to wear a gun, a fact which embarasses his doting father and earns him the ridicule of Lash Larribee and his gang of gunslingers, local trouble-makers. Only old Gabby, the Colts' ranch-hand, knows the real reason for Blaine's adamance: practicing in secret, he has discovered that his speed and skill with a weapon are too deadly ever to use. In his own words, "I was fast—too fast! I could draw afore you could blink yore eye. You know my temper, Gabby. If I carried a Colt, I might shoot the first jasper who said something I didn't like. Sure, I'm scared to wear a gun. But not scared the way Dad thinks I'm scared—I'm scared of hurtin' someone!" But Blaine is forced to abandon his pacifistic stance, when his father is killed in a gunfight with Larribee. Strapping on guns at last, he rides into town and avenges his parent. Then, fearing that no one will believe that he, a novice, could have beaten a professional gunfighter in a fair fight, he flees rather than stand trial. Thus begins the saga of Kid Colt, outlaw, a recurring theme in whose adventures is his repeated unsuccessful attempts to clear his name and stop running from the law and lawbreakers alike.

Blond and blue-eyed, Kid Colt's customary attire includes a white Stetson, red shirt, blue pants, and spotted white cowhide vest. He also gains his trusty horse, Steel, a grey stallion, in the origin story, the mount being a gift


GUNSMOKE WESTERN
STARRING KID COLT, OUTLAW AND HE CAN'T OUT-DRAW DRAGO!
MARVEL 12¢
77 JULY
I'M A GOMER! DRAGO OUT-DREW ME BY A MILE!
TOO BAD, KID! BUT, IT HADDA HAPPEN SOMETIME, DIDN'T IT?
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS!

One of Kid Colt's "super-villain" adventures

from his father and broken and trained by the younger Colt. A typical Kid Colt adventure would begin with the Kid either stopping in a town for supplies and a night's rest, hoping not to be recognized by the authorities (which usually proved a forlorn hope, indeed), or being pursued by a posse intent on either "stringing him up" or collecting the ever-varying but always substantial reward offered for his capture. Of course, the series format not only incorporated gimmicks from the movie and TV westerns, but was also the same as that of the successful TV series set in the present day, ***"THE FUGITIVE."*** Most of those who crossed the Kid's trail were either unaware of or had long since forgotten the original "crime" of which he was suspected. They knew him only as a wanted outlaw, a wandering gunslinger (at whose door even more crimes were laid as his career continued), or as a known fast gun, who existed only to be eventually outdrawn by a faster gun (whose "rep" would be made once it was known that he had beaten the famous Kid Colt). The Kid couldn't win for losing: if he saved a stagecoach from bandits, naturally he would be accused of being their accomplice; if he entered a town and was recognized, he would either be forced to defend himself from some young tough out to make a name for himself, or be slapped in jail by the local sheriff. Over the years, Colt tried everything to escape his lonely fate, from attempt-

ing to win a pardon from the state governor, to fleeing to the East, to giving himself up and serving his sentence for evils both real and imagined, to faking his own death and living under an assumed name (a la TV's ***INCREDIBLE HULK*** series). Nothing worked for long, though, and since none of the Marvel western series (except ***GHOST RIDER***) ever had a final story which resolved the ongoing plotline, one must assume that Kid Colt ran till the end of his days.

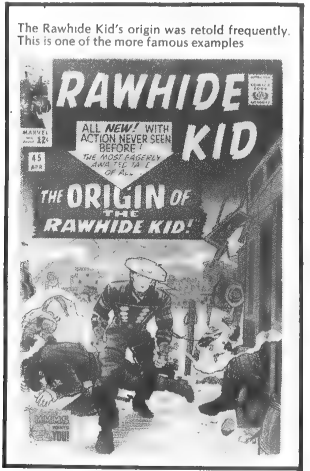
At first glance, ***THE RAWHIDE KID*** seems to be a direct imitation of the success of Kid Colt. But while Colt began publication first, Rawhide outlasted him as a non-reprint title, running up a total of 99 original issues from the start of his second, Marvel Universe-pertinent series. The Rawhide Kid of the first 16 issues bore an uncanny resemblance to the later hero, but was almost a full ***foot*** taller than his namesake. Clearly, this was not the same character who began his adventures in the revived title under Lee and Kirby in issue #17. This new, and eventually more popular Rawhide began his gunfighting career more than a full real-world year before the appearance of The Fantastic Four, and after the cancellations of all the other westerns (before their eventual returns as '70's reprint titles), he continued as the sole all-new Marvel western comic.

The Rawhide Kid takes his name from the town of Rawhide, Texas, where he was raised. He would later discover his real name to be John Clay, but in his origin story in #17 he is Johnny Bart, having taken the name of Ben Bart, his adoptive "uncle" after his parents were killed in an Indian massacre. The elder Bart, a former Texas Ranger, taught the teenage Johnny his skills at gunplay, at which the youngster eventually surpassed his teacher. When Ben was murdered in an unfair gunfight, Johnny avenged him, and became a crusader for justice under the name of the Rawhide Kid. His origin does not end there, however, for in a second story in that same issue, the Kid is wrongly accused of an unprovoked shooting when he had actually acted in self-defense. Fleeing his accusers rather than staying to stand trial, he became a wanted outlaw and fugitive. Storylines concern themselves equally with his personal quest for justice in the Old West and with his struggles to evade the law and clear his name. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? The fugitive, Robin Hood-type, "noble outlaw" idea had worked once, so why not again? But Rawhide was always just different enough from Kid Colt that no one complained much of their similarities, just as Daredevil would only rarely be accused of imitating Spider-Man.

Where Kid Colt was the more typical blond, blue-eyed muscular champion in the mold of so many comics heroes, the Rawhide Kid was the iconoclast among the Marvel western avengers. In contrast to Colt's more colorful garb, Rawhide's entire outfit is a dark blue-black, decorated only by yellow armbands and the addition of large ornamental buttons, in a design reminiscent of Thor's costume tunic. If Colt were the western Spider-Man, Rawhide dressed more like one of the original X-Men. Whereas Colt was well over average height for his time, Rawhide was never depicted as tall—his height is officially unrecorded but has been given as anywhere between 5'2" and 5'6", making him shorter than the "shrimp" of '60's super-heroes, the 5'10" Spidey, and comparable in size to today's shortest male super-doer, the Wolverine. Rawhide is also one of the few red-haired protagonists in comics—only Daredevil comes to mind as an example among the Marvel heroes of the '60's. And finally, a careful study of his origin story shows that he was even left-handed, before his mentor, Ben Bart, trained him to become ambidextrous, at least in the use of a gun. More different than that, you can't get. Then, too, Rawhide was sort of a middle step between Kid Colt and the Two-Gun Kid. True, he quickly became a wandering fugitive, but his original intention was to become a roaming crusader—a sort of travelling super-hero.

The next character under discussion really ***was*** a sort of super-hero of the early West. ***THE TWO-GUN KID*** is chronologically Marvel's earliest double-identity masked hero, with the exception of the original Black Knight. He began his familiar storyline with his 60th issue, again the first issue of a revived series. The Two-Gun of the earlier stories is a different character bearing the same name, who has no resemblance to the present hero, and is possibly the gunfighter from whom Matt Hawk appropriates the semi-legendary name in his original story. Matthew Hawk, attorney-at-law, journeyed from his hometown of Boston to the comparative wilds of Tombstone, Arizona

The Rawhide Kid's origin was retold frequently. This is one of the more famous examples


RAWHIDE KID
ALL NEW! WITH ACTION NEVER SEEN BEFORE!
THE MOST EAGERLY AWAITED ISSUE OF ALL!
MARVEL COMICS GROUP 12¢
45 APR.
THE ORIGIN OF THE RAWHIDE KID!

TWO-GUN KID
10¢
50 CENT
A THRILL-A-MINUTE EPIC IN THE OLD-TIME MANNER!
THE TERRIBLE REVENGE OF THE TWO-GUN KID!
NOW'S OUR CHANCE!! GET THE KID!!
BE ON HAND WHEN "GUNS BARK IN BOOMTOWN!"
© 1960 Marvel Comics Group

The old Two-Gun, without his guitar

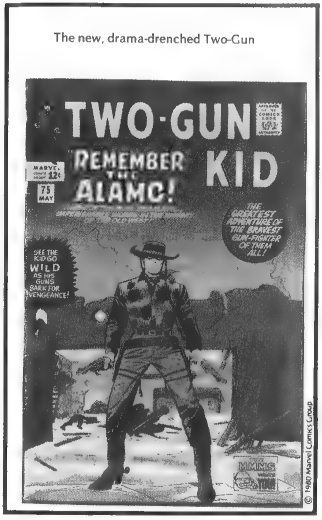
(mistakenly called Tombstone, Texas in the first issue), in an unspecified year in the mid-1800's on the advice of his doctor, who felt that Matt was "too weak, too run-down." Befriended by aged ex-gunfighter Ben Dancer, he trains in both hand-to-hand fighting and gunplay, becoming a master at both. He then borrows the name of fictitious (?) gunfighter of whom he had read in the East, the Two-Gun Kid, and crusades for law and order in his masked identity, while continuing to pose as a timid dude as Matt Hawk in order to protect himself from reprisals.

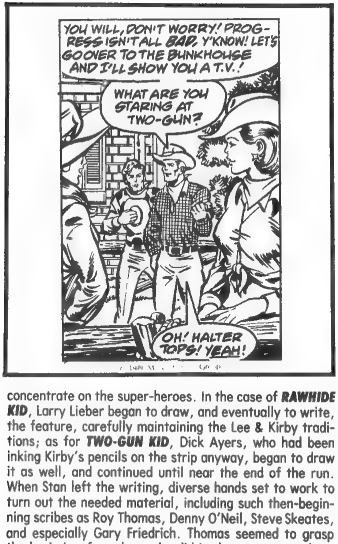
The strip, unlike those of the outlaw heroes, has regular supporting characters, including Nancy Carter, the town schoolteacher and Matt's girlfriend; Brett Barton, the town sheriff; and "Boom Boom" Brown, ex-prize fighter and Matt's best friend, who eventually becomes the only confidante of his dual role (other than Ben Dancer, who passes from the strip after the origin).

Also, although Two-Gun occasionally adventures in other locales, most of his tales take place in and around the Tombstone Territory. Thus he serves as a focal point for the adventure in which the present-day Avengers meet the western heroes. Having met and teamed with both Rawhide and Colt in previous adventures, Two-Gun naturally enlists their aid, along with that of Ringo and Night Rider, to battle the time-born menace of Kang when that villain takes over in the Tombstone of 1873. Two-Gun is also the only one of the western stars to recognize the relationship between himself and the latter-day champions with double identities and super-human skills. He goes so far as to return to the present with the Avengers, and to team up for a time with Hawkeye (Clint Barton), a possible descendant of his friend, the Tombstone sheriff, in a series of 1970's adventures, before returning to his own time. Alas, no adventures of the Two-Gun Kid after his return to the 1800's have been recounted.

These then were the three western heroes being published by Marvel in the early '60's. As mentioned, their books' format evolved from the several-short-stories-per-issue look of most westerns to the Marvel format of one long book-length, or almost book-length epic per issue. The five-page shorts at the back of the westerns were akin to the ***"TALES OF ASGARD"*** featurette which concluded every issue of the early ***THOR*** comics, although these stories never featured the title character, as Thor's did at times. Most of the stories were written by Stan Lee, until his work on the superhero line and editorial duties in general began to take time away from the minor titles, such as the westerns, ***PATSY*** and ***MILLIE*** titles and ***SGT. FURY***. Kid Colt's principal artist throughout his run was Jack Keller, and while both Rawhide and Two-Gun started out with Jack Kirby at the artistic helm, they quickly inherited new artists as Kirby, too, went on to

The new, drama-drenched Two-Gun




YOU WILL, DON'T WORRY! PROGRESS ISN'T ALL BAD, Y'KNOW! LET'S GO OVER TO THE BUNKHOUSE AND I'LL SHOW YOU A T.V.!
WHAT ARE YOU STARING AT TWO-GUN?
OH! HALTER TOPS! YEAH!

concentrate on the super-heroes. In the case of ***RAWHIDE KID***, Larry Lieber began to draw, and eventually to write, the feature, carefully maintaining the Lee & Kirby traditions; as for ***TWO-GUN KID***, Dick Ayers, who had been inking Kirby's pencils on the strip anyway, began to draw it as well, and continued until near the end of the run. When Stan left the writing, diverse hands set to work to turn out the needed material, including such then-beginning scribes as Roy Thomas, Denny O'Neil, Steve Skeates, and especially Gary Friedrich. Thomas seemed to grasp the basic Lee formula, as he did in the many super-hero series he would inherit from Lee, but he wrote only a very few western stories. The other writers seemed never to have read a Marvel western before being asked to script one. They made errors in what bare-bones continuity the strips possessed, introduced characters whose names changed from story to story, and whose relationship with previously-known characters in the strip was never made clear, and most noticeably of all, they ignored the moral-story format of the various series. Suddenly the Marvel western heroes no longer shot guns out of villains' hands; instead, they were comparatively out for blood. Innocent bystanders perished merely to emphasize the brutality of either the villain, or the western environment, or both. When ***KID COLT*** and ***TWO-GUN KID*** were cancelled in 1968 (only to return as reprint books in 1969), many fans breathed a sigh of relief. Better no westerns than shoddy westerns... and besides, we still had Lieber's ***RAWHIDE KID*** to read.

Before the demise of the aforementioned titles, however, two of the gentlemen mentioned above had gotten together and launched a new western project. In the early '50's, Dick Ayers had created and drawn a western hero for Magazine Enterprises' ***TIM HOLT COMICS*** called the Ghost Rider. Now with a first-issue plot by Thomas and Gary Friedrich, and scripting thereafter by Friedrich, Ayers brought back the Ghost Rider as a Marvel hero. Even more so than the Two-Gun Kid, the Ghost Rider was rooted in the super-hero world of fixed locales, secret identities, and super-powers, for all that he was still a western character. He premiered full-blown in his own title, ***GHOST RIDER*** #1 dated February 1967. Unlike the original hero, who had been a disguised marshal, the new GR was in reality schoolteacher Carter Slade, a character only slightly less namby-pamby than lawyer Matt Hawk. (Carter Slade was, at least, a name that writer and reader could easily remember; even Stan Lee was wont to mistakenly call ol' Two-Gun by the real name of Daredevil, lawyer Matt ***Murdock***). Gifted with seemingly mystical (but really only elaborate trickery) abilities by an Indian medicine shaman, the only legitimate source of magical or pseudo-scientific powers in a western story, who had in turn gotten them from a fallen meteor and a mysterious voice, Slade became the Ghost Rider, whose all-white costume covered his entire body and who tended to disappear at will when shot at by villains. Where Colt had Steel, Rawhide had Nightwind, and Two-Gun had Thunder, GR had an all-white (of course) steed called Banshee, who even had an eerie ghostly whinny. By the second issue, he had added the skills of gunfighting to his repertoire, and thus no longer needed to depend solely on scaring his enemies with his now-you-see-me, now-you-don't shenanigans.

Besides super-powers and a secret identity, the Ghost Rider had a regular supporting cast. Jamie Jacobs, a youngster he adopted after the lad's parents were killed by marauders, was the sole confidante of his double role. Sheriff Ben Brooks, a reasonable man most of the time, had an almost insane distrust of the Ghost Rider, and served as a J. Jonah Jameson-like nemesis to "He Who Rides the Night Winds," as the Ghost Rider liked to call himself when speaking in his assumed spook patter. The sheriff's sister, Natalie Brooks, also served as the series' female lead and Slade's love-interest... but with a difference. Determined, one must suppose, to break with at least some of the traditions of the super-hero ***and*** western series in doing this already atypical title, Friedrich made the Slade-Brooks relationship more hopeless than any unrequitted love of a Marvel hero by having Natalie engaged to another man, Clay Riley, before she ever met Carter Slade (who of course fell inexplicably and instantly in love with her at first sight). "I thought I knew the height of romantic hopelessness back in Ohio," muses Carter (another newly-arrived dude from back East) in one issue, "but this is even worse!"

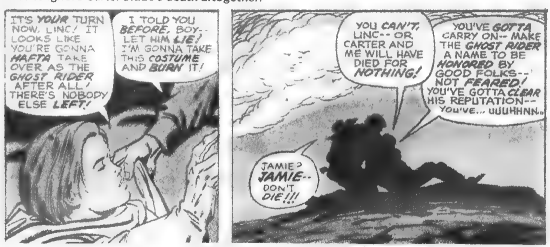
The worst, however, was still in store for the Ghost Rider. The series seemed to dwell on tragic themes to the exclusion of all joy. In a confrontation between GR and Sheriff Brooks, Natalie is accidentally shot and becomes a paralytic. Before it can be revealed whether she will be cured, ***GHOST RIDER*** is cancelled, with its 7th issue. When the series is revived in the western umbrella title, ***WESTERN GUNFIGHTERS***, in 1970, Clay Riley is revealed

One of the original Ghost Rider's patented spooky entrances. This doesn't quite work with a motorcycle.

to be the Ghost Rider's arch-enemy, the Tarantula, thus causing more suffering for the members of the regular cast. Finally, in ***WESTERN GUNFIGHTERS*** #6, the Rider himself is shot down and killed! In the final GR story, in ***WESTERN GUNFIGHTERS*** #7, young Jamie takes over the role in Carter's place, and ***he too*** is killed! (One begins to imagine one is reading the western equivalent of ***COMBAT KELLY AND HIS DEADLY DOZEN***.) In the last panel, Carter's brother, Lincoln Slade vows to take up the mantle and become the third Ghost Rider, but the series ends again, and we never see how Linc made out. Shortly after this, Marvel premiered a new hero in ***MARVEL SPOTLIGHT***, a flaming-skulled supernaturally-endowed motorcyclist who quickly gained his own book and is still with us today; his name, of course, was the ***GHOST RIDER***. In order to avoid confusion, still later when they reprinted the western ***GHOST RIDER*** series (or most of it), Marvel changed his name, and that of the book itself, to ***NIGHT RIDER***, and that is how the character is known whenever he chances to appear in a new story, be it his team-up with the other western heroes in ***AVENGERS***, or his more recent appearances in the magazine of his modern-day namesake.

Before departing the '60's, it behooves us to touch on one of the most novel aspects of the Marvel westerns: their villains. Aside from the usual professional gunmen, bank robbers, stagecoach Indians, ***et al.***, the Marvel western heroes fought super-villains! Yes, real, honest-to-gosh, costumed, sometimes super-powered villains, right out of a super-hero story. And many of them had the same or similar names as present-day Marvel villains, leading one to suppose that the modern criminals might be somehow related to, or at least inspired by, their counterparts of a hundred years past. Two-Gun Kid villains included the Fox (his namesake appears in ***STRANGE TALES ANNUAL*** #2); the Purple Phantom (who used the same ghost gimmick as the Night Rider); Goliath; Hurricane (who gained super-speed from an Indian potion); the Panther; and such historical characters as Geronimo and Jesse James. Kid Colt had a veritable Rogues' Gallery of foes, including the Circus of Crime; the Barracuda (similar appearance and modus operandi to today's Captain Barracuda); the Scorpion; and El Lobo. His arch-enemy was Iron Mask, an armored giant who

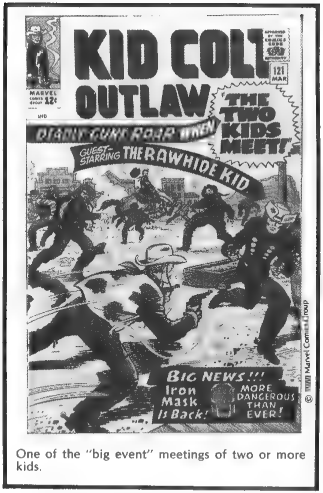
1) An interesting side-note about the Western *GHOST RIDER* is that, although the original Marvel character with that name, Carter Slade, clearly died in battle and had his super-lawman assumed by others, whenever a new story of the Ghost Rider is told in retrospect, it is Carter Slade/Rider and not his replacement. Inasmuch as the GR comic had a tightly-packed continuity, it leads one to wonder if Marvel intends to ignore Carter Slade's death altogether.


IT'S YOUR TURN NOW, LINC! IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE GONNA HAFTA TAKE OVER AS THE GHOST RIDER AFTER ALL! THERE'S NOBODY ELSE LEFT!
I TOLD YOU BEFORE, BOY, LET HIM LIE! I'M GONNA TAKE THIS COSTUME AND BURN IT!
YOU CAN'T, LINC-- OR CARTER AND ME WILL HAVE DIED FOR NOTHING!
YOU'VE GOTTA CARRY ON-- MAKE THE GHOST RIDER A NAME TO BE HONORED BY GOOD FOLKS-- NOT FEARED! YOU'VE GOTTA CLEAR HIS REPUTATION-- YOU'VE... UUUHHNN...
JAMIE? JAMIE-- DON'T DIE!!!

looked like a cowboy version of Dr. Doom. It was Iron Mask who returned to challenge the Kid most often, and who formed a team of his most dangerous enemies, including the boomerang-hurling Fat Man, the hypnotist Bennington Brown, and the master of magnetism, Dr. Danger, who together formed yet another Circus of Crime. Rawhide's enemies included the Bat; Mr. Lightning; the Rattler; the Red Raven (an outlaw with the power of winged flight—those Indian medicine men were everywhere!); the Ape; the Grizzly; the Masked Maverick; the Masquerader (a disguise artist with Chameleon-like talents); and the Scorpion (though not the same Scorpion as in ***KID COLT***). In his brief career, the Ghost Rider faced such villains as the Tarantula, the Cougar, and the Sting-Ray (who was actually Rawhide's Scorpion with a name-change in order to... you guessed it!... avoid confusion).

The western heroes didn't have to face all these fearsome characters alone, though. Borrowing another leaf from the super-heroes book, they often crossed over into each other's titles and teamed up to see justice done; as mentioned earlier, this was how Two-Gun was able to recruit his fellow heroes to battle Kang. Two-Gun met Rawhide for the first time in ***RAWHIDE KID*** #40 and Kid Colt for the first time in ***KID COLT*** #125. Rawhide and Colt met each other first in ***KID COLT*** #121, and all three

No one ever claimed that this was the 40s/60s Red Raven, too, but who knows?
RAWHIDE KID
ATTACKED BY THE RED RAVEN!
HE CAN ACTUALLY FLY!? HOW CAN I BEAT HIM?!?!
© 1980 Marvel Comics Group

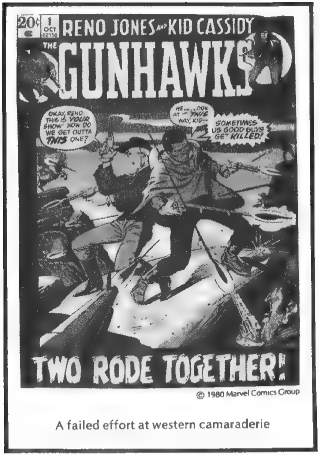

KID COLT OUTLAW
121
THE TWO KIDS MEET!
GHOST RIDER STARRING THE RAWHIDE KID
BIG NEWS!!! Iron Mask is Back! MORE DANGEROUS THAN EVER!
© 1980 Marvel Comics Group

One of the "big event" meetings of two or more kids.

teamed up for the premiere and only occasion in ***TWO-GUN KID*** #89. Finally, Kid Colt met the Night Rider in ***GIANT-SIZE KID COLT*** #3.

This pretty well covers the Marvel western stars of the '60's, but a word or two more is necessary to bring us up to the present. In addition to its attempt to revive the Ghost Rider (the reason most people bought the title), ***WESTERN GUNFIGHTERS*** also showcased a host of new western characters in an abortive attempt to resuscitate the then-failing Marvel western line-up. The first issue also introduced a scar-faced bounty-hunter (not nearly so facially deformed as Mr. Hex, however) named Gunhawk, whose series would eventually dovetail with Ghost Riders' when the two characters met in #4. (Still later, Marvel would publish a short-lived western called ***GUNHAWKS***, forcing Gunhawk to change his name to Bounty-Hawk, again to avoid confusion, like GR before him.) "Tales of Fort Rango" introduced us to an F Troop-like company of soldiers and their hardnosed reformer commandant. "The Renegades" were four men falsely accused, not of murder or robbery, but something far worse: deserting the Alamo! The original series quickly dropped by the wayside to be replaced by reprints, however, and after GR's demise, the book reverted to a normal-sized reprint title, having been a 25¢ giant for issues #1-7.

Since that time, only three attempts at new western


20¢ 1 OCT 6
RENO JONES and KID CASSIDY
THE GUNHAWKS
OKAY, RENO, THIS IS YOUR SHOW. HOW DO WE GET OUTTA THIS ONE?
IT'S YOUR SHOW, KID!
SOMETHINGS US GOOD GUYS GOTTA BE KILLED!
TWO RODE TOGETHER!
© 1980 Marvel Comics Group

A failed effort at western camaraderie

series have been made at Marvel. One was the earlier-mentioned series, ***GUNHAWKS***. This featured a team of two adventurers, one black, one white, named Reno Jones and Kid Cassidy, and attempted to cash in on the success of the movie ***"Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid"*** in name, and the use of blacks in protagonist roles on western series in TV's ***"The Outcasts"*** and episodes of ***"Kung Fu"*** in theme, and failed at both. In the second-to-last issue, the white character Kid Cassidy was killed off (more senseless tragedy), and the book became Reno Jones, ***GUNHAWK***, for the one more issue that it lasted. Like ***GHOST RIDER***, it ran 7 issues, apparently an unlucky number for westerns.

A second attempt at a new series was all but lost in the mad shuffle of early 70's reprint pandemonium at Marvel. One of the many westerns revived as a reprint book, ***THE OUTLAW KID*** (despite its unoriginal title) tried to make it as a new-material title. Originally scheduled to be scripted by Steve Englehart, ***OUTLAW KID*** was eventually handled by Mike Friedrich, later the publisher of ***STAR★REACH***. "In the Spider-man tradition" bespoke a cover-blurb for the first time since ***DAREDEVIL #1***. Well, the hero, Lance Temple (where ***do*** they think up these prep-school dude ***names***?) did have a masked secret identity (halfway thru the series the mask was changed from a face-bandana to a more traditional eye-mask—one presumes that now that observers had seen first one half of OK's visage and then the other, they would now know who he really was), a recurring nemesis, an unrequited love interest, and even an aged Aunt May-like relative to care for (his blind father was an avowed pacifist, thus occasioning Lance, Daredevil-like, to perform his feats of derring-do under an alias), but this was somehow not quite ***SPIDER-MAN***. It wasn't even ***GHOST RIDER***, but it lasted the usual seven issues, anyway, from issues #10-16, before capitulating, and turning back into a reprint book. At least this series did have an ending, in which the Outlaw Kid beat the recurring villains, revealed his true identity, and lived happily ever after, which alone is enough to make the series noteworthy.

The third attempted series was ***RED WOLF***. This one wasn't as tragic as the last few mentioned, but it was equally confusing. Red Wolf first appeared as a guest-star in ***THE AVENGERS***. He was present-day Indian Will Talltrees, who took on the identity of Red wolf under the guidance of an Indian spirit and became a living symbol to his people, the avenger of his parents' deaths, and a super-hero, to boot. The next appearance of Red Wolf, however, was in ***MARVEL SPOTLIGHT*** #1, where he tried out for his own series. But this was not the same Red Wolf. The new series was set in the familiar Old West of

THIS TOWN OWES YOU A LOT, LANCE... AND WE'D LIKE TO START BY SAYIN' WE'RE SORRY BY OFFERIN' YOU THIS BADGE!
OH, TAKE IT, LANCE! IT'S YOUR CHANCE TO BE RESPECTABLE! THEN WE CAN BE MARRIED, AND...
This was the "happy" ending. The hypocrite girlfriend now wants to marry Lance...
© 1980 Marvel Comics Group
MAYBE I SHOULDN'T HAVE TURNED THEM DOWN.. BUT I STILL HAVE DAD TO THINK ABOUT!
MAYBE IF HE UNDERSTANDS WHY I BECAME THE OUTLAW KID... BUT THAT'S THINKING TOO FAR AHEAD!
ALL I CAN BE SURE OF NOW... IS THAT THERE IS NO MORE OUTLAW KID! FROM NOW ON... WHEN I NEED TO BE A MAN... IT WON'T TAKE A MASK TO MAKE ME ONE!
THE END

Rawhide and Co. and starred Johnny Wakeley, an Indian youth raised by white parents and faced with the lifelong dilemma of belonging to two races and yet neither, in a time when those races are continually at odds. This new Red Wolf was granted his own series and ran for six issues before poor sales called for either cancellation or a change of format. The latter was tried, and suddenly, without warning, in issue #7, ***RED WOLF*** was once again set in modern times, as a super-hero book. ***This*** Red Wolf, though, was neither Will Talltrees nor Johnny Wakely. When Marvel finally gave him a new origin in #9, he turned out to be one Thomas Thunderhead (why this was so, and what happened to the Talltrees/Red Wolf from ***AVENGERS***, no one knows). His identity crisis instantly became academic, anyway, because #9 was his final issue.

And then there were none. Last year, Marvel cancelled its last two remaining western reprint titles, the revived ***KID COLT*** and the venerable ***RAWHIDE KID***. If you never read a Marvel western, you missed something. You missed some good stories, some good artwork, some novel concepts. You missed villains who would both inspire and be inspired by the mainstream Marvel badguys. And you missed heroes of a kind rarely if ever seen in comics today. ●

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A TALK WITH *BILL GRIFFITH,* THE MAN BEHIND:

ZIPPY

This interview was conducted by COMICS FEATURE underground expert Brad Walker in the late summer of 1980. It was transcribed by him and edited by Walker and Howell.

WALKER: We're talking with Bill Griffith, the underground cartoonist most famous for Zippy the Pinhead, Mr. the Toad, Claude Funston, and others. So what can you tell us about the Zippy for President campaign? Is he elected yet?

GRIFFITH: Since I do the strips ahead of time, the answer is yes. I'll give away the secret of the 80's: Zippy will be President—albeit for a brief span, perhaps an hour or two—as long as he's interested.

WALKER: Are there any problems with writing an essentially stream-of-consciousness character?

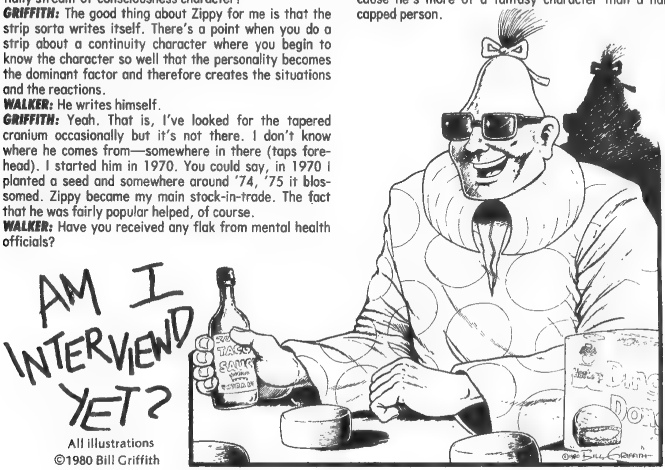
GRIFFITH: The good thing about Zippy for me is that the strip sorta writes itself. There's a point when you do a strip about a continuity character where you begin to know the character so well that the personality becomes the dominant factor and therefore creates the situations and the reactions.

WALKER: He writes himself.

GRIFFITH: Yeah. That is, I've looked for the tapered cranium occasionally but it's not there. I don't know where he comes from—somewhere in there (taps forehead). I started him in 1970. You could say, in 1970 I planted a seed and somewhere around '74, '75 it blossomed. Zippy became my main stock-in-trade. The fact that he was fairly popular helped, of course.

WALKER: Have you received any flak from mental health officials?

GRIFFITH: None whatsoever. Except occasionally I'll get a letter asking me for donations to a mental health center or something, and they'll always couch it in terms of "You've done good things for the handicapped with your character Zippy." Zippy's basically a winner, he wins out in most situations, he foils the bad guy or whatever. In that sense he's a hero even though he's handicapped; and the handicapped nature of Zippy is strictly an outsider's point of view. Anyway, it's not really something you would think of if you read the strip for very long, because he's more of a fantasy character than a handicapped person.



WALKER: How's your relationship with ***HIGH TIMES***?

GRIFFITH: Well, I've managed to survive 25 or 30 editors in four years. That's no exaggeration, either. Right now I'm doing a monthly strip for them and I've got a contract for a while, so as long as they last I guess I'll be with them.

WALKER: Who was your first character?

GRIFFITH: Mr. the Toad was created sometime in the mid-'60's with no intention of doing him in comic strips.

WALKER: For what, then?

GRIFFITH: Just for my own amusement. He comes out of ***WIND IN THE WILLOWS***, which is a children's book.

WALKER: But you call him Mr. ***the*** Toad to distinguish him from Mr. Toad.

..WE COULD RUN A HOSE FROM OUR GAS OVEN ALONG THE FIRE ESCAPE TO THEIR BEDROOM WINDOW--
NAH.. WE NEED PRACTICAL IDEAS..LIKE DRILLING HOLES IN THE FLOOR AND POURING DOWN STREAMS OF HOT WAX..
MOM'S IDEA IS GOOD!
WOULD THEY DIE?

GRIFFITH: I didn't do it specifically for that reason—somehow I just did it.

WALKER: Well, it serves, in any case.

GRIFFITH: Yeah. Somewhere around late '68 I began to see Crumb's work. I was in New York at the time. I saw Kim Deitch's work in the ***EAST VILLAGE OTHER***—very early stuff, ***"SUNSHINE GIRL,"*** like that. I just went down to the offices of the ***EAST VILLAGE OTHER*** with a strip (that was ***not "MR. THE TOAD"***) but they rejected it, rightfully, telling me that I was too raw. Then I took a ***"TOAD"*** strip over to ***SCREW*** which was like in its third issue—it's a New York sex tabloid.

WALKER: Oh sure, I've seen it.

GRIFFITH: And they printed it without any questions. Actually the guy who printed it, the art director, is now the art director on the New York Times Book Review. Everybody gets respectable eventually, interestingly enough.

WALKER: So you were at ***SCREW*** magazine to begin with.

GRIFFITH: Yeah, I was in the first eighteen issues or so, until they fired me for being too negative about sex. I think the real reason was they had a bust—they used to get busted every few weeks—and during this bust, the judge held up one of my strips as an articulate, flagrant example of pornography, which is totally nuts. It was a ***"MR. THE TOAD"*** strip.

WALKER: Pornography is in the eye of the beholder.

GRIFFITH: Definitely.

WALKER: What did you think of the takeoff in ***BIJOU*** #8?

GRIFFITH: I thought it was great. I have the originals. Kim and I traded; I did him and he did me and we traded.

WALKER: I wondered who did those stories—they weren't signed.

GRIFFITH: Yeah, that was Kim, and I did him.

WALKER: You did a great job on him.

GRIFFITH: Yeah, I thought so; I worked on it real hard. It was fun. I wish they'd do more issues like that ***BIJOU***. It's just like a lot of other undergrounds, its productions is so sporadic.

WALKER: Were you still in New York?

GRIFFITH: I was in New York for the first year of my cartooning life. I came out here to San Francisco in July 1970. I'd been out here earlier, though, like in January 1970, to sell ***TALES OF TOAD*** #1 to the Print Mint. That was basically a compilation book, although nobody really knew it because the material had been printed in obscure places, but it was strips from ***EAST VILLAGE OTHER*** and ***SCREW*** and some strips done specifically for the book.

WALKER: The only ***TALES OF TOAD*** I've seen is the one where Zippy and the Toad are comedians on the Tonight show with Liberace.

GRIFFITH: Right. That was ***TALES OF TOAD*** #3. Number one by now is a complete collector's item, I'm sure. I only have two copies.

WALKER: So ***TALES OF TOAD*** was your first book.

GRIFFITH: That was my first book and I was surprised as anyone that it was printed.

WALKER: So you came out here—did you go to the Rip Off Syndicate right away?

GRIFFITH: Well, the syndicate is something that's only existed since about '76. I did go to Rip Off Press—when I came out here in July '70 I brought ***YOUNG LUST*** #1, which I'd gotten together with Jay Kinney in New York.

WALKER: Dry-humping in an elevator.

GRIFFITH: Right. It's still the best-selling of all five issues. I'm out here with that, thinking it'll be real easy to sell. Whereas with ***TALES OF TOAD*** I though it'd be hard and it took all of five seconds. Actually I took ***YOUNG LUST*** #1 to the Print Mint first. Al Schenker was then in charge of looking at work; she was the wife of one of the owners, or maybe she ***was*** one of the owners. She thought it was a fine idea but it didn't carry through for a whole comic book.

WALKER: A one-joke idea.

GRIFFITH: Right, it was a one-story idea and that was it. To do a whole comic on it was crazy—which I argued against but to no avail. Then I took it over to Rip Off and they said it was real funny, except that they didn't see that it had socially redeeming qualities. Now they didn't mean that in the sense that most people do; they were afraid of a bust and how were they gonna defend it in a bust? An attitude which I respected but which I was disappointed at. Then I took it to Ron Turner who was just starting Last Gasp, I don't think it had the name yet, and he said he was doing a comic that was more positive about sex, which was I think...

WALKER: ***BIZARRE SEX***?

GRIFFITH: No, ***IT AIN'T ME BABE***, which was Trina Robbins' first compilation of material from the feminist newspaper of the same name. It eventually became ***WIM-***

MEN'S COMIX, I guess you could say.

WALKER: All Girl Thrills.

GRIFFITH: Whatever. To me it had no relation to ***YOUNG LUST***, but Turner seemed to think it did. He was wory or something. So I took it to Company & Sons which was a fledgeling outfit that only lasted a few years. They took it instantly and it sold its first ten thousand in a couple of weeks and the rest is history, as they say.

WALKER: Maybe the other four issues haven't sold as well as number one, but it's still one of the better-selling lines of undergrounds.

GRIFFITH: Of all underground comix the top three would be the ***FREAK BROTHERS, ZAP,*** and ***YOUNG LUST***. Probably in that order.

WALKER: Where is ***ARCADE*** in relation to all this?

GRIFFITH: ***ARCADE*** was an effort that we, the underground cartoonists, made as a group (sorta spearheaded by myself and Art Spiegelman) in 1975 to save a floundering artform. Underground comix were in big trouble for economic as well as other reasons—court censorship, busts, etc. That was a bad time. Around '73, '74. So we were coming out of that, we wanted to revive the whole thing and put it in a new direction. Actually get it away from headshops and hard-to-find little stores and put it into the mainstream, into newstand distribution.

WALKER: Like ***COMIX BOOK***.

GRIFFITH: Well, ***COMIX BOOK*** we heard about. As we were thinking about ***ARCADE*** we heard ***COMIX BOOK*** was in the works and that really goosed us into doing it. We were kind of upset that ***COMIX BOOK*** was happening because we didn't feel like we needed competition; we thought everyone should all jump into one boat and row for shore because we were really sinking. We weren't too happy with ***COMIX BOOK*** but we also thought it might help us; it was out on the newsstands, and if it did well, then we would do well. And of course it didn't do well. So it looked to distributors that we were copying, imitating, a loser. And you don't do that in the magazine business; you only imitate a winner.

WALKER: Did you hear a distributor say, in so many words, that ***ARCADE*** was a loser?

GRIFFITH: No, we got distributed briefly by a private distribution system in New York. They took it as a favor because we knew somebody. We did take it to Eastern News which was, and is, a big middle area distributor.

WALKER: Like the Midwest?

GRIFFITH: No, middle in the sense of not big magazines, not little magazines, just respectable-circulation magazines. They would have taken it had we provided them with a promotional budget and that we couldn't do. See, we did the whole thing on a shoestring. It was basically the Print Mint, an underground publisher, putting out what looked like a real magazine but wasn't. We tried to pretend we were "real" so that we'd become "real"—which is how you're supposed to go about making a magazine, actually. But we did it with such a low budget that we couldn't pretend long enough. If we could've kept it up for another year—we had offers from various places; even ***HIGH TIMES*** at one point was interested in publishing it. We had a publisher's agent in New York looking around. But we didn't have enough money to keep it going long enough to get to that point. You're looking at half the staff, basically. We never had a salary for anybody. It was all worked out from my and Art's apartments.

WALKER: One of the things I liked best about ***ARCADE*** was the showcasing of old-time cartoon talents like Milt Gross, H.M. Bateman, et al.

GRIFFITH: Right, we really felt there was a need for that. I'm sure you're aware of dozens of great cartoonists who are completely forgotten and are in dire need of revival. We thought we'd give 'em a little push; it's an old tradition. ***HELP!*** did it.

WALKER: Yeah, Bill Blackbeard is doing a lot of that now.

GRIFFITH: We got a lot of material from Bill Blackbeard; he's doing a terrific job.

Well, ***ARCADE*** died a natural death, because we could never get it to a point where it could live very long. To me, in all modesty, it was like a Golden Age of Undergrounds. I look back on it, I see a lot of pain and torture, personally, that I had to go through, but I see some beautiful things that were made. I'm real happy we did it.

WALKER: Do you see the underground scene floundering now as it was then, or what?

GRIFFITH: More like splintering. The fact that it exists at all means that it's probably never going to flounder. The fact that it can still be going on after ten years.

WALKER: Still crazy after all these years.

GRIFFITH: Right. Staying alive, that's even more of an accomplishment. It's nothing like what it once was, obviously, but that's fine with me. I don't feel terrifically attached anymore to the Underground, Capital-U Capital-G. I'm a cartoonist and that's where I started, that's where I came out of. I still think it's a real nice place to do my work on occasion because there's absolutely no censorship, no problem with publication; it's all people I know and respect and trust and all that. So it's nice that it still exists but I've tried, with varying degrees of success, to widen my horizons, seek other places to be printed. The underground is less confining in the sense that people see it differently. Now some people see an underground, they say it means dope, jokes, sex and violence—the usual cliches that people have. But if you look at the past few years of the undergrounds, even though there's still a lot of the cliches there, there's a lot of other stuff too. ***ARCADE*** was another example, an early example, of how we tried to break that syndrome we were stuck in.

WALKER: But does the public notice?

GRIFFITH: Yeah, many people don't look beyond the flashy stuff.

WALKER: What other markets did you try to expand to?

GRIFFITH: Well, I've done a lot of stuff for magazines like ***HIGH TIMES, CIRCUS*** magazine, I've worked for the ***NEW YORK TIMES*** on occasion doing illustrations. The Rip Off Syndicate, even though it's certainly an underground-oriented thing, put me and a bunch of other artists into anywhere from ten to fifty newspapers and magazines

across the country, almost none of which were underground.

WALKER: Such papers as the ***CHICAGO READER***, for example.

GRIFFITH: Right, right. For example, in this area, the ***BAY GUARDIAN***; that kind of paper, alternative but fairly mainstream, available almost everywhere. So being in those papers was nice for me, it gave me a feeling that I had an audience beyond the headshop type.

WALKER: What kind of illustrating did you do for the ***NEW YORK TIMES***?

GRIFFITH: They had a feature, which I guess they still have, called the OpEd page, opposite the Editorial page.

WALKER: Opinion and Editorial.

GRIFFITH: Right, and I illustrated a number of things there. I still keep up contact but being 3000 miles away I don't do too much work for them. I basically don't do much illustration; I supported myself—with the exception of a brief fling with Topps Bubble Gum—completely with Underground comix and other types of comics.

WALKER: I don't know anything about this Topps Bubble Gum business; what is it?

GRIFFITH: Topps Bubble Gum is the main bubble gum.

WALKER: They do Bazooka, I know that.

GRIFFITH: They are ***the*** bubble gum card manufacturer in the country—Fleer is number two I guess. My connection with them is through Art Spiegelman, who was (and still is in some ways) the resident genuis at Topps Bubble Gum. He's an idea man. Since he was sixteen he hung around there, because that's where Wally Wood worked at the time. Jack Davis was there once in a while. They did little mini-comic books for the cards.

WALKER: *BLUNDER WOMAN? JESTER'S LEAGUE? FANTASTIC FEAR?*

GRIFFITH: No, those were for little kids; they weren't parodies, they were straight comics, little tiny gag books, an inch by an inch and a half.

WALKER: You mean those minibooks in the gumball machines?

GRIFFITH: Something like that, yeah, except they were really well-done, by really good artists, and fairly funny gags. And Art Spiegelman, when he was fifteen or sixteen, went in there more or less as an adoring fan and came out with a job, because he was full of ideas. And he's been there ever since.

WALKER: He's not the guy who's responsible for ***WACKY PACKAGES***, is he?

GRIFFITH: Yes, and you're looking at the other half of the team that's responsible for ***WACKY PACKAGES.***

WALKER: The old ***MAD*** magazine idea.

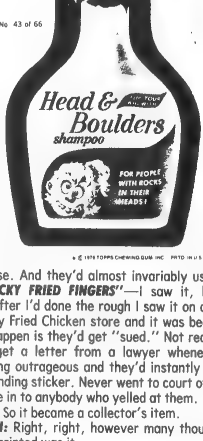
GRIFFITH: Exactly, right. Harvey Kurtzman originated it and Art re-invented it, called it ***WACKY PACKAGES***, and then I collaborated with him, doing, I don't know, between us we probably did three-fourths of them. We didn't do the final paintings; those were done by these great old hacks, these great old pulp cover hacks they had who'd turn out these beautiful paintings. Oh, man. We just did the roughs.

WALKER: Like ***"QUACKER OATS."***

GRIFFITH: *"GENERALLY DEMENTED LIGHTBULBS."*

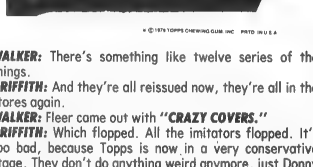
WALKER: *"BOREDOM COFFEE."*

GRIFFITH: *"KENTUCKY FRIED FINGERS."* That was one of mine; we would do like thirty in a night, and we'd always throw in a few just for fun, ones we thought they'd never use. And they'd almost invariably use them! Like ***"KENTUCKY FRIED FINGERS"***—I saw it, like within a month after I'd done the rough I saw it on a window in a Kentucky Fried Chicken store and it was beautiful. What would happen is they'd get "sued." Not really sued, but they'd get a letter from a lawyer whenever they did something outrageous and they'd instantly stop printing the offending sticker. Never went to court over anything, just gave in to anybody who yelled at them.



WALKER: So it became a collector's item.

GRIFFITH: Right, right, however many thousands they'd already printed was it.



WALKER: There's something like twelve series of the things.

GRIFFITH: And they're all reissued now, they're all in the stores again.

WALKER: Fleer came out with ***"CRAZY COVERS."***

GRIFFITH: Which flopped. All the imitators flopped. It's too bad, because Topps is now in a very conservative stage. They don't do anything weird anymore, just Donny Osmond cards. They don't do anything crazy.

WALKER: I always wondered who did those things. We

stuck them on all our notebooks in junior high.

GRIFFITH: Right, right, they were real big.

WALKER: Of course, now Art Spiegelman has his new magazine ***RAW*** out.

GRIFFITH: Which is sort of a ***"SON OF ARCADE"*** in some ways. The impulse is similar although by now it's changed to something totally unrelated to underground comix. It's something completely on its own, which, when we did ***ARCADE***, we didn't want to do (and probably couldn't have done). But now the time is ripe for something that is just itself, period.

WALKER: What do you think of ***RAW***'s chances?

GRIFFITH: Well, it's not designed to make a profit, which is great.

WALKER: Because it couldn't anyway.

GRIFFITH: It couldn't. At the stage it's at it couldn't possibly. They printed 5000 copies and sold them all within a month. Which is terrific, you know, he made all his money back from printing. And within a few issues, if the art-

Medi-Quak
RELIEF FOR DUCKS
It's for the birds
SOOTHING RELIEF FOR CHOKING VOMIT, OVER BURNS AND FEATHER PLUCKING
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ists keep giving him work for free, he may be able to pay artists. Stranger things have happened, than ***RAW*** would be a success and well-distributed. It's a shame, because magazines like ***RAW*** exist all over Europe. France has something like ten...

WALKER: FLUIDE GLACIAL.

GRIFFITH: Right... and ***CHARLIE*** and ***CHARLIE HEPDOE***. There's a whole slew of comix magazines. Each major cartoonist has his own critic; they have paperbacks coming out every six months, and these are in many ways the equivalent of underground comix; they're kinda free-wheeling, experimental, basically uncensored stuff. You can go to libraries in Paris and get to see a whole range of things that you'd never get to see here. There's an audience for it. That's what I hope ***RAW*** will do: create an audience. It's there, it's there. It's not a helluva lot, nothing like the French market or even the German market, but the population here is ten times that—should be enough to support one magazine.

WALKER: When I was in Paris I went to a couple of these places and besides everything else they had copies of ***ARCADE*** and ***ZAP*** (in English)—which of your characters do best there?

GRIFFITH: Zippy does the best anywhere. A lot of Zippy was printed in a magazine that lasted about a year called ***B.D.*** which stands for Bandes Dessinees.

WALKER: A strip of pictures.

GRIFFITH: A strip of pictures, and that was put out by ***CHARLIE*** as a slightly more experimental sister publication. Unfortunately it failed and they never paid me. I tried to sue—it's a hairy story—they published I think like ten, twelve issues, three or four covers, without asking me. I found out the whole thing after it happened. I mean, I'm flattered in a way, but I'm not happy about being ripped off, ever.

WALKER: Plagiarism is the sincerest form of flattery?

GRIFFITH: I hope not. Payment is the sincerest form of flattery. Right now I'm doing a lot of stuff in German.

WALKER: Original for Germany?

GRIFFITH: No, it's reprints but I'm working for two different German publishers doing paperbacks. I'm doing them right now for Lutz Reinicke who has a publishing firm called Zwei Tausand Einz, which is the firm that did the ***CRUMB SKETCHBOOK***, the elaborate edition, and also a Gilbert Shelton book which I hope they also do in English so I can get it distributed over here. They're starting a branch over here.

WALKER: Sounds good. When did you first use the Griffy character?

GRIFFITH: Ummm. No one's ever asked me that before. I would guess around '72, maybe '73 but I can't remember where.

WALKER: GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY, I should think.

GRIFFITH: Actually I used the character, the way he looked, before I did the ***GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY*** strip, before I gave him a place in the strip.

WALKER: That's right; he was in ***TALES OF TOAD*** #3, at least.

GRIFFITH: That's right. I just wanted to have an autobiographical character, an extension of myself. Once again I don't know quite why I made myself look that way, except that I tend to have cowlicks. I just exaggerate having a cowlick. ***"THE KEEPER OF THE OBSERVATORY"*** strip developed into something that Rip Off eventually syndicated and that I put into the comic, in which the actual,

the Griffy-me character just became the narrator.

WALKER: Yes. First it was a four-panel gag-a-week strip featuring Griffy talking to his imaginary toad friend that eventually developed into more "social-commentary" strips.

GRIFFITH: Right. That was real successful for the syndicate. A lot of papers took it, I guess, because they saw it as almost political cartooning, the feeling of amusing commentary on things that were happening.

WALKER: More sociological is what I get.

GRIFFITH: The Rip Off Syndicate is either hibernating or dead, I don't know which, right now and it's sort of sad, because that was a part of myself that I can't put into Zippy or too many other places. I can't express that direct social commentary anywhere else.

WALKER: Larry Gonick [of ***THE CARTOON HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE***] says he imagines it's going to start up again in the fall.

WALKER: What's this fascination with imaginary toads like Louie?

GRIFFITH: What's my fascination with Toadettes? They, to me, represent chaos and mindlessness. If there were fifty Toadettes, altogether they would barely have a quarter of a mind. Zippy is not dumb; the Toadettes are dumb. It's a way for me to experiment with dumb people, the mind of someone that's pretty dumb, that just exists; an uncritical attitude towards everything; just reacts to things, an uncritical thought process.

WALKER: No depth.

GRIFFITH: No depth at all. It seemed funnier to make a whole lot of them instead of just one, because they're inter-changeable.

WALKER: Mr. the Toad is the avatar.

Griffith: Right, although he's not dumb. He's crafty and wily...

WALKER: And pure gross...

GRIFFITH: And gross and mean. I mean, Mr. the Toad could never have become my most popular character, there's no way.

WALKER: He's the dark side. Isn't there a picture of you in ***ARCADE***, you're half-Zippy half-Toad?

GRIFFITH: Right.

WALKER: And that's about the way it works out.

GRIFFITH: Well, I hope I'm more than just half-Toad. Actually, a little while ago I did a strip which is going to be printed in ***ZIPPY*** #3. That's in the works now, it'll be out in about a month. I did it for an anthology book but it's finally going to see print. It's called ***CAST OF CHARACTERS*** and it's the story of of how all my characters came to be. Sorta a phony psychological analysis. It takes place in an old age home I'm wheeled up to (this is about 1998 or something) and all the cartoonists are there, they're all sorta puttering about and snoring and drooling on their crossword puzzles. Out in back are all these bungalows where all the cartoon characters live. They look the same as they always do, they don't age, and they're all sort of resentful that they're not being used anymore, not given stories anymore. So I get captured by them and each one confronts me and does a combination of berating me an explaining to me who he is and why he is the way he is. Kinda interesting strip.

WALKER: Talking about your characters, I never knew where you got Claude Funston until I came to San Francisco and drove by the street.

GRIFFITH: The name Funston definitely comes from the Funston Street, right, but that's named after this guy Funston who saved San Francisco during the earthquake and fire.

WALKER: Hm? I never heard that.

GRIFFITH: General Frederick Funston was in charge of the Presidio—it was really an army base then, not much of one now—and the mayor of San Francisco when the earthquake hit was this real corrupt weak feeble guy who instantly took off for parts unknown. He just didn't wanna be around; his regime was collapsing, he just left the city. General Funston just basically took over, declared martial law, and saved the city. Whatever parts are left are due to his actions. But he was a very authoritarian dictatorial guy, about four foot eleven. Very weird character.

WALKER: Sounds Napoleonic.

GRIFFITH: Claude Funston's persona doesn't relate to his, but that's what I named him for; that and the fact that his "fun" is in it, of course. "Tons o' fun." (Laughs) Once someone described Claude Funston to me as a failed Gary Cooper which is pretty accurate. It's the way I like to think of him.

WALKER: How about Albert Jarry and his play ***PERE UBU***?

GRIFFITH: Probably, I think, someone told me to check it out because I was doing similar things with Mr. the Toad, similar to Jarry's work. Pere Ubu is a creation of Jarry's that comes out of his adolescence. It's just this grossout character he used to poke fun at his teachers. Actually Pere Ubu was a parody of one of Jarry's old teachers. Albert Jarry lived and created most of his plays and ideas round the turn of the century. As an artist he fit in with the whole Avant Garde movement totally unintentionally. He was basically a crazy person who happened to be a great writer. He produced some great things and then burned out at the age of 33. Died of a drug overdose, with alcohol. I'm doing things with Jarry that are a little different. There's a book called "the Banquet Years" by Roger Shattuck, an art critic. This first part is divided into four sections which are basically biographies of Jarry, Apollinaire, Fatie,and Rousseau. They were all contemporaries, they all knew each other in turn-of-the-century Paris. What comes through when you read the book, is that as interesting as Jarry's work was, the personality that he created was much more interesting. He really was a walking work of art. He created and kept up a consciously formed character which was basically Ubu. He always talked — He-talked-like-this-He-nev-er-made-an-y syl-la-ble-sound-an-y-dif-fer-ent-from-an-y-oth-er-syl-la-ble... Ver-y-mon-o-tone. Sort of like the Coneheads. He rode a bicycle everywhere, and he lived between two floors in a building. He had a three-foot space, so he made all his furniture; he called them "reductions." —completely nuts, he was, but fascinating.

WALKER It was interesting that he lived at the same time as the other artists and they knew and influenced each other. Seems to be the prerequisite for being creative, when you think of the Algonquin Table, the Hemingway-Fitzgerald crowd, or even the Underground Cartoonists...

GRIFFITH: Yeah, there tends to be a group feeling when a bunch of artists are doing what's termed "unacceptable" by the mainstream. They tend to stick together and use each other for comfort as well as inspiration. I really felt that, in the late 60's-early 70's, in underground comix. We used to hang around the same comic book store on 23rd and Mission Streets. Every week there was a party; there was this real scene, you know, it was nice. Nothing like that can last a long time. Everybody starts going their own way after awhile—buy while it lasted it was what kept us all going. The page rate we were getting, the money we were making was poor, so to keep doing it we just had to keep encouraging each other.

WALKER: You mentioned the Coneheads a while back there, and I know you've shown them in the strip—have you heard anything from **"SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE?"**

GRIFFITH: A friend of mine in New York knows someone who writes **"For Saturday Night,"** and what I've heard is that when Dan Ackroyd thought up the Coneheads, the writers had heard of Zippy, had read **ZIPPY, there might** even have been a copy of **ZIPPY** in the room—there was a lot of Zippy-consciousness. But of course the Coneheads grew into something quite different. I mailed John Belushi a copy of **ZIPPY** and he wrote back asking if Zippy would host the show. I wrote back, as Zippy, demanding no commercials and asparagus in my dressing room and that's the last I heard from anybody connected with the show.

WALKER: Of course, Zippy could've hosted the show—there's an actor from the Duck's Breath Mystery Theatre who portrays Zippy, what's his name?

GRIFFITH: Jim Turner. He just called me yesterday from Minneapolis; they're touring the country right now. Every year they tour the country with their comedy act, they're real successful in their own way. They have more bookings than they can ever accept.

WALKER: Is he doing Zippy—

GRIFFITH: He's been doing Zippy for about 2 years. But over the past year he's been doing Zippy more intensively, and for the past six months he's been doing Zippy for President. The way that works is I write the scripts and he does his interpretation of what I write. Luckily he has a real stage presence; by now he has a firm grasp on Zippy, although it's not—and it could never be—**my** Zippy. But it's a good-enough Zippy, people get off on it.

WALKER: I heard he's gone on Cable TV with it.

GRIFFITH: He's even on regular TV with it. Starting next week on KQED, Channel nine...

WALKER: The Public Television channel...

GRIFFITH: PBS has purchased, in quotes—in other words they got it for nothing—the **"ZIPPY TAPES"** that we've done. We've done nine programs, about three or four minutes each, and they'll run them every Saturday night at 11.

WALKER: Great.

GRIFFITH: And then every Friday night at 12:40, which is when that SatNiteLive clone Fridays goes off, right after that they're gonna run them. It's all part of a show called Video West. What underground comix were to comics Video West is to TV—experimental, freewheeling.

WALKER: Commendable—if they can pull it off, of course.

GRIFFITH: I think they will. In the same sense that underground comix had a reverberating effect on comics, and all kinds of things in the early-mid-70's, this kind of TV is going to have its effect—it's taking like the next step beyond **SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE.**

WALKER: Does Jimmy eat Ding Dongs with taco sauce?

GRIFFITH: Never has passed his lips. Although there was an episode—we did this press conference where Zippy announced his candidacy, which was on April Fool's Day. We had this press conference at the Great American Music Hall in San Francisco and we provided free Ding Dongs and taco sauce—although I never saw anyone take the taco sauce and put it on the Ding Dongs ; at the end when they were eating the Ding Dongs the taco sauce was just sitting there—no one had opened it. We taped this news conference and at the end we had this tag line where two "members of the audience" (in actuality two members of Duck's Breath) are sitting around deciding whether or not to vote for Zippy. They start eating the Ding Dongs and one of them puts taco sauce on it, saying "It's not half bad," and they were actually eating it. They reported that it wasn't that bad, didn't destroy their stomach linings.

WALKER: Have Ding Dongs , I mean Hostess contacted you?

GRIFFITH: No, I haven't gotten a high enough profile for that to happen yet. Maybe they'll take it like the handicapped people's centers, free publicity, all to the good.

WALKER: Are there any plans to make a movie out of Zippy?

WHY IS THE CEILING SHAKING, POP? ARE WE IN ROCHESTER?
IT MUST BE BECAUSE THIS WARPED RECORD ISN'T PLAYING LOUD ENOUGH!!
WHO WANT'S SOME OYSTERS WITH BEM-BEM AN' COOL WHIP?
ARE BOTH T.V.S ON??

GRIFFITH: There are a couple of feelers out for that to happen. I've been contacted by a couple of producer and/or promoter types who want to do it. I was offered various deals which I turned down mostly because I didn't like the way the contracts read. It wasn't my idea to do a

movie, but as a result of all the interest I got sorta interested and I started a script. If these guys come up with the right kind of deal I'll probably do it; at this point I'm actually interested in doing it.

WALKER: How about ***SHORT ORDER COMIX***?

GRIFFITH: In the sense that ***RAW*** is the graduate of ***ARCADE***, ***SHORT ORDER*** is the precursor.

WALKER: The high school.

GRIFFITH: Right. ***SHORT ORDER*** was a comic put together by Art Spiegelman and myself as editors. We had a glorious vision of changing underground comix, but it was shaped by our tastes in the same way that ***ARCADE*** was. We just did it for this publisher in Aspen, Colorado whom we never met. But his partner came to San Francisco and was a nice enough guy, gave us the money up front so it was okay by us.

WALKER: You were taking earlier about the problems in underground cartooning in '73, '74, Middle-America fear of pornography...

GRIFFITH: Well, there was this Supreme Court decision, which is still in effect, that says communities can set the standards as to what's pornography and what's not. This decision came real quick, like the week after ***YOUNG LUST*** was busted.

WALKER: And ***BIJOU #8***.

GRIFFITH: Right, ***BIJOU #8***, and the reaction of the comic book stores, the places that sold them, was to send everything back to the publishers. Take everything off the shelves, put it in a box and just send it back.

WALKER: So in '73 you were getting busted.

GRIFFITH: Right. That was a real slump, the first big slump. A number of publishers had a hard time getting back on their feet.

WALKER: What happened? What changed the attitude? That wouldn't happen today, would it?

GRIFFITH: That is happening to a degree right now; has been for a couple of years, because of inflation. See, the '73-'74 slump coincided with a big inflationary period which we got out of and which we're getting into again. This time it's even worse; ask anybody.

WALKER: The Recession.

GRIFFITH: So someone comes into a comic book store. The price of a comic book has gone up to $1.75 or something. The customer says, "I wanna buy it, but I can only buy one. I used to be able to buy two for $2, but now I can only buy one." So the amount of comix being sold goes down even though the cover price compensates so much. The number of titles has gone down, the number of underground cartoonists goes down—the only ones that can get through this hassle are the ones that sell well: ***FREAK BROTHERS***, ***ZAP***, ***YOUNG LUST*** and, fortunately, ***ZIPPY***. '73 also coincided with the end of the war; up till then almost anything they published sold 10,000 copies to an avaricious audience. They bought whatever they saw. But somewhere around '73, '74 they decided to get sensible as to what they did and didn't like. They said, "Well, I'm not gonna buy ***GOOGYRAMA*** #4, it's not what I want." A number of titles just sat there.

WALKER: How about mechanics—what kind of pens do you use?

GRIFFITH: I do all my work with a combination of a brush and a crowquill. I use a Windsor & Newton #1 brush for my figure drawing, mostly, and for backgrounds I use a Hunts 101.

WALKER: Paper?

GRIFFITH: Two-ply bristol plate; I think it's what everybody uses.

WALKER: What started you cartooning?

GRIFFITH: It was just a rather weird chain of events. I went to Pratt Institute, which is an art school in Brooklyn. I didn't graduate; I spent three years there, took my scholarship money and went to Europe. Never came back to Pratt. Then I fancied myself a painter for about seven years. Lived in New York, had a couple of small gallery shows, mostly of drawings, never of paintings. Somewhere around late '67, early 68 I began to see the early ***zaps***, I saw Kim's and Crumb's work in the ***EAST VILLAGE OTHER***. I had a friend who was a primitive cartoonist, he'd been doing cartoons since he was five years old in these books, just an endless stream of books, all really quite good, all with his heroes looking like him and just going around the world, being a swashbuckler or something.

WALKER: These were private editions?

GRIFFITH: Private? They were never printed, they were just one-of-a-kind. Book after book. This guy was an actor, this was just his childhood obsession. It never stopped; I think he still does it. So he wrote a story, a science-fiction character who goes to this planet—just all dirty jokes and sex and weirdnesses.

WALKER: Typical early underground.

GRIFFITH: He said, "Howdja like to illustrate it?" 'cause he didn't think he was good enough. He was probably better than me at the time, but he didn't think he was. So just getting in on his energy I did it. Once it was done I looked at it and said, "Hm, my old friend Kim"—whom I knew at Pratt—"and this other guy Crumb"—whom at first I actually couldn't distinguish from Kim, which I'm ashamed to say—"well, these guys get printed, why shouldn't I try to get my stuff printed?" So I took it down and it did eventually get printed in ***SCREW***, like I said.

WALKER: What was the title?

GRIFFITH: I think it was ***"SPACE BUTTOCK."*** It's about this guy who lands on a planet where people just have asses for bodies.

WALKER: Sounds like Robert Williams and his ***"ASS-O-GRAMS."***

GRIFFITH: Yeah, it was anal in the extreme. So when it was printed I was thrilled at the idea that 10,000 people were looking at by scribbles as opposed to eight people looking at a painting in my apartment. Over a period of six months I slowly abandoned painting and took up cartooning without realizing what was happening. Before that I had no inclination—except that my paintings were kind of humorous. But I had no background except liking cartoons.

WALKER: What kind of likes and dislikes did you have in comics?

GRIFFITH: I've always leaned towards humor and away from super-heroes and adventure; it's fine by me, but that stuff is something that you do when you're 12-15 years and then grow up, whereas at any stage of life humor is relevant.

WALKER: What titles in particular?

GRIFFITH: When I first started doing comix? ...

WALKER: Yeah.

GRIFFITH: I always liked ***DICK TRACY***. I always knew it was right—reactionary politically—it was at the time, it hadn't always been—I responded to comics then almost the same as I respond now, except I have a little more knowledge of the language of comics. I like the way a strip reads, it's more important than the way it looks. But I'm very much aware of that as well. ***DICK TRACY*** reads good; it's real fiction, real writing. ***LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE***, ***POPEYE***—these are well-written stories.

WALKER: Of course, that was in the days when continuity was encouraged, not like these days.

GRIFFITH: Yeah, continuity is hard to find these days.

WALKER: So what are your favorites these days?

GRIFFITH: Most of my favorite comic art right now is being done in Europe. The artists in—I don't know if you've seen ***AUSSCHRIEBER***, which means "to be continued"; ***AUSSCHRIEBER*** is more intellectual than most French comics. It's the least worried with pleasing a large audience.

WALKER: The audience got more selective.

GRIFFITH: They got more selective, which was great.

WALKER: Except for the artists.

GRIFFITH: Except for some of the artists who were being discarded.

WALKER: The Free Enterprise System In Action.

GRIFFITH: Right. See, when I was starting out I was part of the glorious beginning time when everbody bought anything. I was all looked at as part of the counterculture. But now it's harder for a young artist to get started, real difficult. Young artists just starting out ask me what should they do, where should they go... I used to send them to Rip Off or Last Gasp, but the economics are against that now. Now I say send the stuff to the ***NATIONAL LAMPOON***, or alternate newspapers, or even publish it yourself.

WALKER: The New Wave artists.

GRIFFITH: Now that is real encouraging. I don't like it all but I really like the fact that it exists. They're doing what we did, in a way; doing their own little magazines, their own printing and stuff. This option is always open—if you're energetic and can get distributed.

WALKER: But you say it's inflation, why comix aren't selling.

GRIFFITH: Inflation, more than any other single factor. Underground publishers are like other small businesses; their costs go up, their line of products gets cut down. What keeps Undergrounds alive right now are just a few things that sell well. ***FREAK BROTHERS #6*** came out, when was it, two months ago, sold 50,000 copies in two weeks and that gave a tremendous jolt to the whole range of underground comix, because when Dealers order, reorder the other five ***FREAK BROTHERS*** books, they also order a little bit of everthing else, and that makes everybody feel real juiced up for a few more months. Even though the Freak Brothers are kind of just shadows of themselves, it's real encouraging.

WALKER: The 60's have been shadows for a long time.

GRIFFITH: It's mind-boggling; as popular as Zippy is, he's way overshadowed by the Freak Brothers. But the Freak Brothers are labelled "Sixties," and it's an advantage these days to be labelled "Sixties." ***HIGH TIMES*** is the same way. I guess every year there's a new crop of 18-(or 8-)year-olds who smoke dope for the first time.

WALKER: And listen to ***"SGT. PEPPER"*** for the first time.

GRIFFITH: They go through the whole trip; they buy everything, the books, the pipes, the posters. The Love Generation has become a rite of passage.

WALKER: Something similar in Japan—you know, comics in Japan are not just for kids...

GRIFFITH: You can say that about any culture but ours. That's maddening to me. Comics have this stigma of being kid's stuff.

WALKER: Meaning gimmicky, cartoony, unreal...

GRIFFITH: Two-dimensional. All words that are used and expected by everyone. We live in a culture that doesn't respect one of its few original art forms, jazz and comics.

WALKER: And bourbon. You think it's efforts like ***ARCADE*** and now ***RAW*** that'll help find an audience?

griffith: Somehow, someday, it's going to happen. It might take more European-like stuff. Not ***HEAVY METAL***, that's still for a kid audience. A little bit older, maybe, but some of the European magazines put out put ours to shame. A lot of American art forms have to go through Europe to be appreciated here.

WALKER: Anything on fellow Independent John Anderson?

GRIFFITH: Anderson—his hair is too white.

WALKER: Gonick said he was a Carter clone with glasses.

GRIFFITH: All cartoonists are visually-oriented.

WALKER: We're almost finished, any last words?

GRIFFITH: Everyone go in there and Vote for Zippy! The choice is simple: Reagan or Zippy, either one simpleton or the other!

WALKER: Somewhere in Esconido a dwarf is crumbling. Thank you Bill Griffith.

YOW★YOW★YOW★YOW★YOW★YOW★YOW★YOW★YOW

MARVEL COMICS

The following comics will bear an ***April*** cover date and will be on sale in ***January***(December shipping schedule)

MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #74 — Written by TOM DeFALCO Art by JERRY BINGHAM and GENE DAY The **Thing**, **Giant-Man**, and the **Iceman** take in the deadliest show on Earth, hosted by the Ringmaster and his Circus of Crime.

SPIDER-WOMAN #37 — Written by CHRIS CLAREMONT Art by STEVE LEIALOHA and BRUCE PATTERSON This is the book that all Comicdom is yelling about — and with good reason! The Web-lady's fast becoming one of Marvel's most exciting characters and if you don't want to miss out on the excitement — then don't miss the mag!

STAR TREK #13 — Written by MARTIN PASKO. Art by JOHN BUSCEMA and TOM PALMER When mad energy-beings take control of a sister starship, the *Enterprise* and her crew must come to the rescue But even *they* don't have a clue to how to stop the creatures!

MARVEL SUPER HEROES #96 — Re-presenting Incredible Hulk #146, written by CONWAY with art by TRIMPE and J. SEVERIN. In the desert sands, the green Goliath takes on the Israeli army! Plus, the *Leader* returns!

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #215 — Written by DENNY O'NEIL. Pencils by JOHN ROMITA, JR. New York is anything but a winter wonderland for the Wall-crawler when he faces death at the hands of a mystery menace!

CAPTAIN AMERICA #258 — Written by ROGER STERN. Art by JOHN BYRNE and JOE RUBINSTEIN. Cap plays Sherlock Holmes as he becomes enmeshed in mysterious multiple murders on board a *zeppelin*!

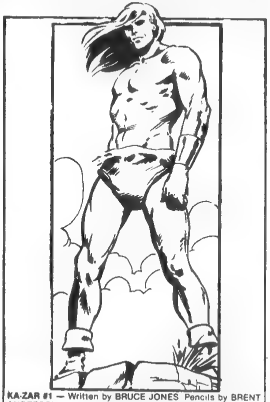
THOR #306 — Written by MARK GRUENWALD and RALPH MACCHIO Art by KEITH POLLARD and CHIC STONE Enter, the Crusader. His mission, destroy all pagan deities — including the god of Thunder! Beware his terrible swift sword!

MICRONAUTS #26 — Written by BILL MANTLO. Art by PAT BRODERICK and ARMANDO GIL The incredible climax to the SHIELD/Hydra/Karza epic, featuring the most unbelievable civil war in history as *all* the races of the Microverse come through the space wall to earth and battle for or against ***Baron Karza!***

GHOST RIDER #55 — Written by MICHAEL FLEISHER. Art by DON PERLIN. Ghost Rider vs. Tatterdemalion — in Las Vegas!

SAVAGE SHE-HULK #15 — Written by DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT. Art by MIKE VOSBURG and FRANK SPRINGER. While Jennifer Walters must defend Zapper's MD dad against a phoney malpractice suit, her green-skinned alter ego fights as never before to save an innocent life!

DAZZLER #2 — Written by TOM DeFALCO. Pencils by JOHN ROMITA, JR. Inks by ALFREDO ALCALA. It's Dazz vs. the Enchantress, guest-starring every dang Marvel hero we could think of — and then some!



KA-ZAR #1 — Written by BRUCE JONES Pencils by BRENT ANDERSON Inks by CARLOS GARZON *Primeval Premiere issue*!! Marvel's lord of the jungle returns — in his own long-awaited mag — to discover a new land and a new love It's Marvel magic at its best!

DOCTOR STRANGE #46 — Written by ROGER STERN Art by GENE COLAN and DAN GREEN In the tradition of Dormammu and Cyttorak, we now bring you Ikonn, master of illusion and reality! Is he Doc's ally or adversary? Read it and find out.

INCREDIBLE HULK #258 — Written by BILL MANTLO Art by SAL BUSCEMA The jolly green giant's on a European tour But if you're betting he'll do more rampaging than sight-seeing — you're *right*!

AVENGERS #206 — Written by BILL MANTLO Art by GENE COLAN and DAN GREEN When even the **Human Torch** can't stop Pyron, the Lord of Fire — it's the Avengers' turn at bat!

CONAN #121 — Written by J.M MATTEIS Art by JOHN BUSCEMA and ERNIE CHAN Conan comes upon a magical city whose civilization is in perfect balance. But what is the chilling *"Price of Perfection?"*

MARVEL TALES #126 — Re-printing Amazing Spider-Man #149, written by CONWAY with art by ANDRU and ESPOSITO. The final fate of the Jackal. It's a mind-snapper!

X-MEN #144 — Written by CHRIS CLAREMONT Art by JOHN BYRNE and TERRY AUSTIN. Wolverine goes *mad* in "Return to Cheyenne Mountain!"

ROM #17 —Written by BILL MANTLO. Art by SAL BUSCEMA. Cover by BOB LAYTON. Guest-starring the ever-uncanny X-Men! Plus: the all-new menace of the half-wraith, half-human entity called...Hybrid!

WHAT IF #28 — Written by MIKE W. BARR. The far-out follow-up to Captain America #250: "What If Captain America Had Been Elected President?"

COMING ATTRACTIONS

MOON KNIGHT #6 — Written by DOUG MOENCH Pencils by BILL SIENKIEWICZ Be our guest at an unusual experiment in story-telling as we present a top-secret tale that'll blow ya away!

FANTASTIC FOUR #229 — Written by DOUG MOENCH Pencils by BILL SIENKIEWICZ What would you call a living black hole? We call him the Ebon Seeker — and the FF will call him *death*! Plus: who is Firefrost and how does *she* fit into the story?

MARVEL TEAM-UP #104 — What super-star will cross paths with Spider-Man this month? Only the Fates — and this mag's close-mouthed editors — know for sure. But from the crafty glints in their eyes (the editors', we haven't seen the Fates'), we've got a feeling it'll be worth checking out. Please do so.

IRON MAN #145 — Written by DAVID MICHELINIE Art by JOHN ROMITA, JR and BOB LAYTON Three high-powered new foes for ol' Shellhead: *the Raiders*!

PETER PARKER #53 — Written by ROGER STERN Pencils by MARIE SEVERIN Web-spinning action, heart-wrenching drama, and a couple of Spidey surprises — all for a measly half-a-buck. Ya can't lose!

DEFENDERS #94 — Written by J.M. DeMATTEIS Art by DON PERLIN and PABLO MARCOS Head up! Your favorite non-team mag is taking off in wild new directions! There's gonna be a new style, a new mood, and a new magic as the Defenders face an ancient evil in a small Virginia town!

MARVEL SUPER ACTION #30 — Re-presenting Avengers #69 written by THOMAS with art by S. BUSCEMA and GRAINGER The Growing Man! Kang! The Grandmaster! Need we say more? Plus: Marvel U.K.'s *Hulk*!

MASTER OF KUNG FU #99 — Written by DOUG MOENCH Art by MIKE ZECK and GENE DAY. He's back! The surprise favorite new character of the year — Rufus "Super Midnight" Carter. The martial arts champ needs Shang Chi's help — but Chi ain't within! Plus: Leiko on the trail of a modern-day Jack the Ripper!

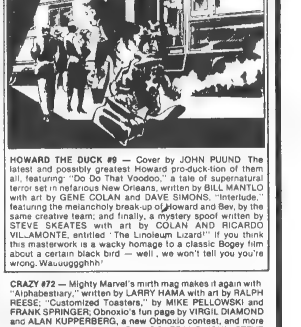
POWER MAN/IRON FIST #98 — Written by MARY JO DUFFY. Art by KERRY GAMMILL and RICARDO VILLAMONTE *Now on sale monthly!* Luke Cage loses his powers! But he and Iron Fist still have to take on the **Defenders**' old foe, the hideous human/gorilla *Headman*, Arthur Nagan!

STAR WARS #46 — Written by ARCHIE GOODWIN Pencils by CARMINE INFANTINO Artoo-Detoo and See-Threepio fight the Empire on the mechanical planet known as *"Droid World"*

MARVEL PREMIERE #59 — Written by MILLS and WAGNER Art by DAVE GIBBONS. Cover penciled by GENE DAY From the hallowed halls of British Marveldom comes another riotous journey into time and space with *Dr. Who!*

SGT. FURY #163 — From the battle-scarred vaults of Marvel, we proudly bring you a classic tale of the Howlers in cataclysmic conflict against the worst the Axis can dish up! Truly the war mag for people who hate war mags!

MARVEL MAGAZINES
(Cover dated *March*)



HOWARD THE DUCK #9 — Cover by JOHN PUUND The latest and possibly greatest Howard pro-duck-tion of them all, featuring: "Do Do That Voodoo," a tale of supernatural terror set in nefarious New Orleans, written by BILL MANTLO with art by GENE COLAN and DAVE SIMONS. "Interlude," featuring the melancholy break-up of Howard and Bev, by the same creative team; and finally, a mystery spoof written by STEVE SKEATES with art by COLAN AND RICARDO VILLAMONTE, entitled "The Linoleum Lizard!" If you think this masterwork is a wacky homage to a classic Bogey film about a certain black bird — well, we won't tell you you're wrong. Wauuuggghhh!

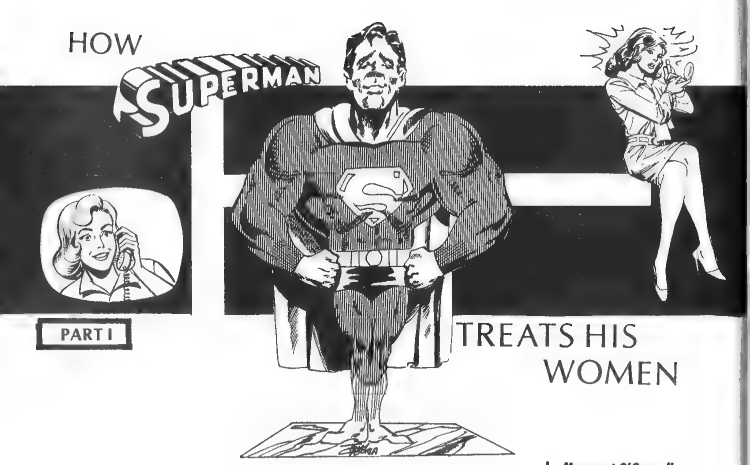
CRAZY #72 — Mighty Marvel's mirth mag makes it again with "Alphabestiary," written by LARRY HAMA with art by RALPH REESE; "Customized Toasters," by MIKE PELLOWSKI and FRANK SPRINGER; Obnoxio's fun page by VIRGIL DIAMOND and ALAN KUPPERBERG, a new Obnoxio contest, and more fresh funny stuff from ARNOLDO FRANCHIONI, STEVE MELLOR, JIM OWLSLEY, MARIE SEVERIN, STEVE SKEATES, PAT BRODERICK and ARMANDO GIL. Yock it up!

SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #62 — Written by MICHAEL FLEISHER. Pencils by JOHN BUSCEMA. Conan at the mercy of an entire race of savage Amazons!

MARVEL PREVIEW #25 — (Originally scheduled for #24) — Cover by PAUL GULACY. A special issue dedicated to fantastic females. First, an espionage thriller starring Marvel's own femme fatale, the *Black Widow*, written by RALPH MACCHIO with art by PAUL GULACY. Then there's *Lady Daemon*, written and drawn by MICHAEL GOLDEN, spotlighting twin sister sorcerers, their battle with each other, and its startling effect on the Hindenburg disaster. And rounding things out will be DENNY O'NEIL and MARSHALL ROGERS' ***Daughters of the Dragon***, featuring Colleen Wing and Misty Knight!

While we will never knowingly print inaccurate information in these pages, Marvel Comics reserves the right to make any changes which may become necessary. We're sorry for any inconvenience this may cause. —The Bullpen

HOW SUPERMAN TREATS HIS WOMEN



PART I

by Margaret O'Connell

In the December 12, 1978, issue of **US** magazine, Christopher Reeve, star of "Superman — The Movie," states that, "I wanted to portray him (Superman) as a man who takes one look at Lois Lane and thinks, 'This is it.'" In another interview, Reeve remarks that the Man of Steel "finds the love of his life very early. Lois Lane is the love of his life...A commitment is always better than messing around. But it's not always easy to get the commitment." As far as Superman is concerned, that's the understatement of the century. Up until quite recently, the Superman of the comics has been anything but the considerate, straightforward Gentleman of Steel, unswervingly devoted to his one true love, portrayed by Chris Reeve on the silver screen. In fact, the comic book Superman's marked propensity for ignoring, rejecting, two-timing, and tricking Lois Lane, and every other female he's ever been involved with, is so overwhelming that it inspired Michael L. Fleisher, author of ***THE GREAT SUPERMAN BOOK***, to come up with an elaborate psychoanalytical explanation for the caped Kryptonian's peculiar approach — avoidance conflict in regard to women.

According to Fleisher, it all began back on Krypton, which unfortunately exploded before the infant Kal-El was able to work out his normal Oedipal feelings toward his parents, Jor-El and Lara.

> "In Oedipal terms, the infant Superman wished his father dead so that he could possess his mother. And then, all at once, the first part of the forbidden fantasy came true: the entire planet exploded and his father perished. Even adults often fear the consequences of a forbidden fantasy, but for a babe in arms to wish his father dead and then have the wish come true produces an unendurable agony of guilt, engendering, deep within the unconscious, the conviction that one's innermost needs and feelings are cataclysmically destructive, that one's most deeply felt wishes are irredeemably evil .
>
> "If, deep within his psyche, a man believes that his wishes are capable of destroying those he loves, he will, unconsciously, take steps to see to it that no one falls in love with him. By pursuing Lois Lane as Clark Kent — and not as Superman — Superman assures himself of being rejected while at the same time protecting Lois from the evil, destructive creature he knows he really is. Superman's most persistent rationalization for his unwillingness to become emotionally involved with women is his fear that they will become the targets of gangland retribution. Because this fear is not entirely without its rational basis, it serves to validate Superman's internal conviction that his love is destructive and thus to reinforce his neurotic determination not to allow himself to become vulnerable to a woman."
>
> (THE GREAT SUPERMAN BOOK, pp.396, 409)

But, says Fleisher, the disastrous circumstances of Superman's escape from Krypton and the death of his parents have also affected his attitude toward women specifically in ways which cause him to treat them quite outrageously at times. This is made quite clear by the innumerable stories of cruel hoaxes he plays on Lois, Lana, and even his cousin Supergirl, and by the incredible fickleness and unwillingness to commit himself to any woman that is especially characteristic of tales from the '50's and '60's, but recurs in stories dating as late as 1972.

> "The sudden, violent loss of his mother while he was

> still an infant, during a period of his life when his psyche was grappling with the complexity of his affectional and erotic feelings for her, has left Superman with a deep reservoir of unconscious hostility toward women. Like many orphaned children, he saw the death of his mother as a personal desertion. He loved and needed his mother, and yet she left him.
>
> **(THE GREAT SUPERMAN BOOK**, p 408)

This is all very interesting, and would undoubtedly be quite helpful in untangling the motives of the comic book Superman if such a person existed. However, the men who wrote, drew, and edited the comics that provide Fleisher with the material for this psychological case study have no such excuses for their own hostility toward women, clearly expressed through the conduct of the fictional Superman. The comic creators' fear of and contempt for women, as well as their paradoxical attraction to them despite these feelings of dread, are the real reasons for the Man of Steel's frequent lapses into behavior more appropriate to a Cad of Steel — behavior which is rarely condemned or even regarded as particularly out of the ordinary by the other characters in the comics, even the women who are hurt by it.

The comic creators' distrustful ambivalence toward women, and the readers' unruffled acceptance of this ambivalence and the bizarre ways in which it is expressed by the action of the comics, are in turn a reflection of what has traditionally been the generally accepted view of women in society. This view holds that women are fundamentally unfathomable and other, unstable and irrational creatures whose narrow thought processes are ultimately fearfully alien, determined by factors totally different from those that motivate men, who are more fully rational and thus more fully human. Seen in this light, women are not only the weaker sex in themselves, but the cause of weakness in others, inevitably sapping the strength of any man who allows himself to be too deeply affected by them. Since the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans, a man who allows himself to be too concerned with pleasing a woman, or even with spending more than a fraction of his time with women or with his own children or other members of his family, has been regarded as soft and womanish himself, not quite a "real man." Although this idea has lost some of its force in recent years, it had already helped to determine the form of the twentieth century masculine ideal which virtually all comic book superheroes still embody.

I CAN'T LEAVE YOU JOR! MY PLACE IS AT YOUR SIDE... I'M STAYING!
PLEASE LARA... MY DARLING...
NO, JOR! BESIDES, WITHOUT MY WEIGHT, THE SHIP HAS A BETTER CHANCE OF REACHING EARTH!
THEN... AT LEAST OUR SON WILL OUTLIVE HIS WORLD!
©1980 DC Comics Inc.

Poor Ka-El! He never recovered from his first, negative encounter with a woman.

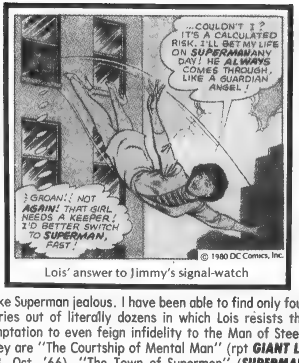
As the original four color exemplar of the ideal American man, Superman reflects the anxiety about women of society at large as well as of individual male writers, editors, and readers. The attitudes manifest themselves most clearly in Superman's reluctance to admit more than the most superficial feelings for any woman, his fear of limiting his options and making himself vulnerable by a close relationship with just one woman (a type of relationship which superhero comics generally tend to equate with the hero's losing not only his bachelor freedom, but his strength and masculinity), and his seldom openly stated, but obvious, conviction that no woman is really worthy of him. The fact that these attitudes have not only been virtually unquestioned by generations of comics fans, but actually taken for granted as the normal psychological equipment for a man who is supposedly perfect, or as near to it as any fictional character can be without being regarded as insufferably dull by the reader, suggests that this society's male ideal is an undisputably masculine, even macho, heterosexual man who simply has no need or desire to bother with women, except in the most transitory and superficial way. If Superman's ambivalent and even hostile behavior toward women can be analyzed as a coherent individual neurosis (as it has been by Fleischer), it is a neurosis shared by the millions of people, male and female, who have made the eternally unattached, and therefore "unweakened," Man of Steel the most successful in a long line of embodiments of the ideal American male as invincible loner, infinitely desirable to all women, but accessible to none.

The view of women (as fundamentally weak and unworthy of a "real man's" attention) that underlies this conception of the male ideal affects comics writers' and editors' characterizations of the women in Superman's life, as well as their — and the readers' — idea of what is appropriate behavior for Superman himself. This is especially obvious from the portrayal of women in stories published in Lois Lane's own comic during the 1950's and '60's. Female characters, even supposedly top-flight investigative reporters, are almost invariably presented as trivial-minded to the point of journalistic incompetence. Lois Lane thinks the antics of her own fan club are bigger

news than an important new development in a generational campaign (''Lois Lane's Anti-Superman Campaign,'' ***LOIS LANE*** #62, Jan. '66, p. 3); Lana Lang, ordered to cover a major astronomical discovery, tells Clark Kent, ''The only stars I'm interested in are movie stars!'' (''The New Superman,'' ***SUPERMAN*** #172, Oct. '64, p.2). The women in Superman's life are consistently characterized as willing to take suicidal risks to get the Man of Steel's attention, often resorting to jumping out of windows as the most convenient way of contacting the caped Kryptonian in a hurry. The Superman women are also incredibly snoopy and incapable of restraining the insatiable curiosity even when they know it's likely to get them into serious trouble. Finally, perhaps the most revolting of the many ''feminine'' traits displayed by Superman's various girlfriends and female relatives is not their emptyheadedness, their uncontrollable curiosity, or even their inability to think of anything but catching the man of their dreams, but their unbelievable fickleness.

Actually, this fickleness is probably as much due to comic creators' perennial inability to find a way to handle heroines properly as to their low opinion of women's constancy. As the careers of Supergirl and many other superheroines show, until very recently, comics editors and writers have seemed to have some difficulty in finding anything for female characters to do except have a new romance every issue. (They now have difficulty finding anything for superheroines to do but quarrel with a different male colleague every issue, but that's another article.) Since in Lois' and Lana's case the problem of what the heroine should do this time is further compounded by the fact that her lack of super-powers limits what she realistically can do, the plot-hungry comics creators have even more of an incentive to fall back on the tried-and-true one-issue romance ploy than they do with female leads who conceivably could spend the story saving the world or at least leaping tall buildings with a single bound. Unfortunately, since Lois, like Lana, is already supposed to have found her one true love, the endless stream of new boyfriends the writers provide her with in the stories dating from the '60's and early '70's make her seem not just shallowly over-impressionable and susceptible to a handsome face, like Supergirl, but downright disloyal and unfaithful.

Although during this period both Lois and Lana are supposedly hopelessly in love with the Man of Steel, they manage to fall for some other man at least once every few issues of the ***Lois Lane*** comic. A more or less random sampling of about 30 ***Lois Lane*** back issues turned up no less than 12 stories in which Lois actually appears to forget Superman and fall in love with another man. In a number of other stories, such as ''The Snoopiest Girl in History,'' (***LL*** #56, April '65), in which she agrees to marry an inhabitant of the ancient Greek Golden Age when she is sent back through time, and ''Lois Lane's Super-Lesson'' (reprint ***GIANT LL*** #68, Oct. '66), in which she pretends to consider a rajah's proposal, Lois pretends to reciprocate the feelings of various suitors in order to


...COULDN'T I ? IT'S A CALCULATED RISK. I'LL BET MY LIFE ON SUPERMAN ANY DAY! HE ALWAYS COMES THROUGH, LIKE A GUARDIAN ANGEL!
:GROAN!:: NOT AGAIN! THAT GIRL NEEDS A KEEPER! I'D BETTER SWITCH TO SUPERMAN, FAST!
© 1980 DC Comics, Inc.
Lois' answer to Jimmy's signal-watch

make Superman jealous. I have been able to find only four stories out of literally dozens in which Lois resists the temptation to even feign infidelity to the Man of Steel. [They are ''The Courtship of Mental Man'' (rpt ***GIANT LL*** #68, Oct. '66), ''The Town of Supermen'' (***SUPERMAN*** #153, May '62, ''Lois Lane's Last Chance'' (***LL*** #69, Oct. '66), and ''The Superman of the Past'' (***LL*** #19, Aug. '60). This last only qualifies by a technicality, because although Lois is attracted to Samson, the ancient ''Superman'' referred to in the title, and even agrees to marry him when she is again sent back through time, she only does so because she has no hope of returning to Superman and her own era.]

Lois' unfaithfulness does not go unpunished by the ever-vigilant male writers and editors. Whenever Lois fails to discover that her new love is really a ruthless criminal who's quite willing to kill her as soon as she gets in his way (''Lois Lane—Volunteer Nurse,'' ***LL*** #43, Aug. '63, ''Lois Lane's Jungle Jeopardy,'' ***LL*** #47, Feb. '64, and others), it's usually because there's something else grotesquely wrong with him which is revealed under traumatic circumstances.

In ''The Unknown Superman'' (***LL*** #49, May '64), Strong Bear, an apparently super-powered Indian whom Lois agrees to marry, turns out to be a good-hearted, but monstrously mutated alien. Worse still, Lois inadvertantly causes his death when she drops and breaks the ring that protects him from the harmful atmosphere of Earth. In ''The Unbreakable Spell'' (***LL*** #92, May '69), Lois' growing affection for Bill Biron, the temporarily-assumed human identity of Comet the Super-Horse (!), is punished by Biron's enemy, the evil magician Maldor, who temporarily turns her into a super-horse herself when she refuses to desert Biron in favor of him. In ''When You're Dead You're Dead'' (***LL*** #102, July '70), Lois' new flame, ''Rajah Satdev,'' proves to be a literal demon lover who causes her to sprout horns and a tail and carries her off to Hell when she is accidentally killed by Superman in a fight with Satdev. In ''The Girl Who Destroyed Atlantis'' (guess who?) (***LL*** #42, July '63), Lois falls for an ancient Atlantean double of Luthor who, predictably enough, is

soon revealed as a tyrant whose secret weapon is what caused the lost continent to sink. In "Lois Lane's Future Husband" (**LL*** #90, Feb. '69), Lois, infuriated by Superman's latest callous hoax, which required her to go through a mock wedding ceremony in order to smoke out some criminals who'd vowed to shoot the Man of Steel's bride on her wedding day, agrees to marry Dahr Nel, a Kryptonian who had escaped the destruction of the planet years before by traveling to present day Earth in a time-space device. Dahr-Nel himself is a quite unexceptionable and even admirable character. Unfortunately, he accidentally kills himself and is turned to Kryptonite when he uses Kryptonite-tinged sleeping gas to put himself and Lois into suspended animation so they will be able to start married life hundreds of years in the future, with no Superman around to interfere. Lois naturally finds this tragic accident quite traumatic.

Even when Lois' "unfaithfulness" to Superman is really no such thing, it is severely punished. In "Death House Honeymoon" (**LL** #105, Oct. '70), Lois reluctantly grants the last request of a condemned criminal who had once saved her life and agrees to marry him a few hours before his is to go to the electric chair. It is carefully established that Lois agrees to the brief marriage only to avoid breaking her word, a "crime" which Superman himself has always taken the most excruciating pains to avoid, and in order to fulfill the promise to "do anything to repay you" (p.6) she made to the condemned man, Johnny Adonis, when he saved her from drowning after Superman failed to. We are further informed by Johnny Adonis himself that the marriage will be a marriage in name only. Although the Comics Code prevents any explicit mention of the possibility of sexual consummation of the marriage, Adonis assures us that Lois "won't even be a widow! When I burn in the chair, the marriage will be annulled!"(p.5).

However, despite all these mitigating circumstances, Lois must still suffer for being technically untrue to the Man of Steel. And suffer she does, by being taken hostage in a jailbreak staged by Johnny Adonis and some of his fellow prisoners and then dumped in the river to drown after they have escaped. In fact, at this point Superman is so distraught over her temporary "infidelity" that he isn't even watching over her, and

GREAT KRYPTON!! SUPERGIRL'S ON HER EIGHTH NEW COSTUME --TODAY!!
OH LOIS, HOW I GO GA-GA OVER SUPERMAN!! I WISH HED DISH OUT A LITTLE WOO-DO MY WAY, TOO, BUT HE'S ALWAYS TOO BUSY WITH SOME RESCUE ---OR OTHER---HOW COULD I GET TH' BIG LUG TO NOTICE ME???
OH LANA, YOU COULD ALWAYS JUMP OUT IN FRONT OF A TRUCK!

I'LL JUST RUN NEXT DOOR FOR A COPY OF TODAY'S PLANET, IF YOU DON'T MIND.
I...ER...THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE TO READ THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER FOR A CHANGE. THEY'VE STARTED RUNNING A HILARIOUS NEW COMIC STRIP CALLED NUTSY MONKEY.
SHORTLY, AS LOIS RETURNS...
NUTSY MONKEY, MY EYE!... YOU JUST DIDN'T WANT ME TO SEE THIS, YOU...YOU SUPER-ROMEO!
I WAS AFRAID YOU'D MISUNDERSTAND, LOIS! YOU KNOW I LOVE ONLY YOU! YOU BELIEVE THAT, DON'T YOU, HONEY?
DAILY PLANET
SUPERMAN SAVES REPORTER LANA LANG FROM MOLE-MEN INVADERS!
Superman's attempts to avoid Lois' jealousy drive her nutsy! © 1980 DC Comics, Inc.

Lois is only saved from a watery death by the Thorn, here making a dramatic first appearance. Even then it looks as if Superman's girlfriend has finally made her last headline, since the escaped prisoners, who have waited around to make sure Lois really drowned, open fire on the two women in the water. It is only now that Johnny Adonis, who had stood by in silence while his new wife was thrown into the river, snaps and turns on his fellow crooks, yelling, "I'm not gonna let you blast my wife like she was a fish in a barrel!" (p. 11). At this point Superman belatedly shows up, but not before Johnny Adonis is fatally wounded. Justice finally triumphs, but Lois is "left with a sensational eye-witness scoop of marriage and murder! My fingers will type the story...but every key will tear into my heart...like a dagger!"(p.12).

A similar pattern prevails in imaginary stories in which Lois marries someone other than Superman, and even when she dreams that she has. In "The Bride of Titanman" (**LL** #79, Nov. '69), Lois dreams that she is sent to a parallel dimension where she immediately falls in love with a superhero called Titanman and agrees to marry him. Unfortunately, Titanman turns out to have seven other wives. When Superman shows up and Lois tries to get him to stop the wedding, the Man of Steel just laughs and says, "Are you kidding? I'll be happy to have you married and out of my hair! Say your 'i do's' pretty, Lois!"(p.11). Fortunately, at this point Lois wakes up.

In imaginary stories in which Lois definitely deserts the Man of Steel in favor of someone else, her new love tends to be none other than Lex Luthor. In the first of these stories I have found, "The Bride of Luthor" (**LL** 334, July '62), Luthor reforms before Lois marries him, and goes on to become a great benefactor of humanity with his scientific discoveries. But Lois and Luthor's son, Larry, grows up to be a worse criminal than his father ever was, and winds up killing Luthor by accident when he tries to stop Larry from committing crimes. The story ends with Lois in tears, moaning, "If only I could go back in time and change things!-sob!-Marrying Lex was a terrible mistake!—Why did I do it?—Why? Why??—sob!" (p. 9, Part II). This melodramatic remorse is somewhat relieved in the sequel to this story, "Lois Lane's Outlaw Son" (**LL** #46, Jan. '64), in which Larry reforms and marries Joan Superman, the redheaded daughter of Superman and Lana Lang.

But there is no such happy ending in the second two-part "Lois marries Luthor" story, which begins with "The Lawless Lois Lane" (**LL** #64, April '66) and concludes with "The Musical Murder of Superman" (**LL** #65, May '66). In this story, Lois is turned evil by a mysterious ray and falls in love with and marries Luthor while he is still a criminal. But eventually the effects of the evil-inducing ray wear off, and Lois is driven half-mad with remorse

As far as Supie's concerned, the one on the right could be either Lois or Lana

DC 12¢
SUPERMAN'S GIRL FRIEND
LOIS LANE
LOIS AND LANA... A FREAK ACCIDENT HAS TAKEN AWAY MY SUPER-POWERS AND MADE ME AN IDIOT! NOW THAT I'LL BE AN ORDINARY MAN FOR LIFE I'M SURE NEITHER OF YOU WILL WANT TO MARRY ME
YOU'LL NEVER BE ORDINARY TO ME! YOU'LL ALWAYS BE YOU, THE MAN I LOVE! I'LL MARRY YOU
I'LL BE HONEST WITH YOU...SUPERMAN! WITHOUT YOUR SUPER-POWERS, I WOULDN'T DREAM OF MARRYING YOU!
FEATURING A MODERN LADY OR THE TIGER? PUZZLE!
CAN YOU GUESS WHO IS...
The GIRL WHO REFUSED TO MARRY SUPERMAN!
© 1980 DC Comics, Inc.

over the crimes she committed with Luthor, which include ending Superman's crimefighting career by putting him into suspended animation. When the conscience-stricken Lois, and the equally conscience-stricken Luthor, manage to revive the Man of Steel, he promptly arrests Lois, who is sentenced to ten years at hard labor. Luthor escapes imprisonment because in this story he commits crimes under the alias of Lexo, whose true identity Superman and the police do not know. But Luthor/Lexo is killed while trying to break into the women's prison and free his wife. After this Superman, who still loves Lois in spite of everything, tries to propose, but the bereaved widow tragically declares, "Of course I'm deeply shocked by my villainous deeds...and very sorry! But there's one thing I'll never regret! My love for Lexo! He was a criminal, but he was my man! And I loved him! I still love him...I always will..." (**LL** #65, p.8, Part III). Exit, sobbing inconsolably.

Fortunately, this is one aspect of Lois Lane's portrayal in comics that has changed over the years. Lois still has an occasional suitor besides the ever-present Superman/Clark Kent (such as the conceited novice super-hero named the Human Cannonball who appeared in several 1979 issues of ***SUPERMAN FAMILY***), but she no longer reciprocates such suitors' feelings or leads them on in order to make the Man of Steel jealous. And when Lois apparently falls in love with and marries Luthor for real in ***SUPERMAN FAMILY*** #172, Sept. '75 (imaginary stories having temporarily gone out of style), it turns out to be all a hoax that Lois has staged in order to get close enough to the master villain to get the goods on his criminal operations. True, this hoax almost backfires when Luthor catches on and tries to hypnotize Lois into going through with the wedding instead of exposing his crimes. But though Superman once again has to save Lois, this time it's because Lois herself has taken precautions to ensure that he'll step in if anything goes wrong.

WELL, THAT SITUATION IS EASILY CORRECTED! LISTEN-- I KNOW YOU DON'T NEED TO EAT...
...BUT WOULD YOU...LIKE TO HAVE DINNER WITH ME TONIGHT?
I'D LOVE TO!
© TIME WARNER COMICS, INC.

Although up till a few years ago the women in Superman's life were frequently shown to be spectacularly fickle, the Man of Steel himself was in no position to complain. His own willingness to forget Lana, and even Lois, at the drop of a hat for an apparently much more whole-hearted involvement with another woman, usually super-powered or at least from another world, seems to substantiate some critics' claim that the caped Kryptonian is literally schizophrenic in his emotional relationships — as Clark Kent, he adores Lois Lane, but as Superman, he is completely indifferent to her. This situation was more or less permanently (so far) altered by Marty Pasko during his late '70's tenure on ***SUPERMAN***. Even since Pasko's departure from the title more than two years ago, the current incarnation of the Man of Steel has been portrayed as genuinely loving Lois Lane, definitely ruling out all romantic involvements with other women, and stopping just short of making an overt verbal commitment to marry Lois some day.

But in many earlier stories, as late as the early 1970's, Superman is portrayed as something of a G-rated Super-Casanova. Perhaps the most persistent manifestation of Superman's traditionally characteristic "won't choose just one" attitude toward his female admirers is his continual refusal to choose between Lois Lane and Lana Lang. In story after story, published in the 1960's, Superman expresses exasperation over Lois' and Lana's no-holds-barred rivalry over him, all the while subtly encouraging this rivalry himself with tantalizing expressions of non-preference calculated to keep both women dangling breathlessly. For instance, in "The Girl Who Stole Superman" (**LL** #7), Lois coaxingly asks the Man of Steel, "I've been through so much strain...won't you tell me whom you really like better...Lana..or me?" "Very well! Let me have some paper! I'll write down my answer!" Superman says resignedly. But when the two women read the "answer" as he flies off moments later, all they see is the inconclusive message, "The girl I like best has the initials L.L." (p.21) — initials shared by both Lois Lane and Lana Lang.

A similar situation occurs in "Superman's Romance With Lana Lane" (**LL** #41, May '63). In this story, a magic charm causes Lois and Lana to merge into one woman, the so-called "Lana Lane." Inevitably, the Lois-Lana merger turns out to be only temporary, and to have the side effect of killing both participants, unless another magic charm is used to save one, and only one, of them. Fortunately, just as Superman is about to choose which woman to use the charm on, a chance occurrence undoes the fatal side-effects of the original enchantment in time to save both. But when Lois and Lana once again ask, "Which of us had you decided to save?," the Man of Steel just grins and says, "You'll never know!"(p.8, Story 3).

However, this maddening behavior is nothing compared to Kal-El's irresponsible conduct in "Superboy Meets Lois Lane" (rpt **LL ANNUAL** #1, Summer '62). In this story, in which Lois meets her future heartthrob for the first time while vacationing at a girls' camp near Smallville, the Boy of Steel actually starts the rivalry

between Lois and Lana himself by asking both of them to be his date at the same dance. As it turns out, neither girl is able to attend the dance because an hour before it is to start, they both break out in a rash from poison ivy they were exposed to on a hike — a development Superboy had been counting on when he made the "double date." As the Boy of Steel blithely explains to the readers, "I knew the rash would appear before the dance! That's why I could date them both without really double-crossing them!"(p.12). Obviously, the fact that circumstances beyond anyone's control prevent the much-disputed date from actually taking place hardly justifies Superboy's stringing both girls along for as long as possible, which upsets them almost as much when they finally discover it as anything that could have happened at the dance.

The Lana-Lois rivalry, and Superman's encouragement of it, finally disappeared from the comics in the late '60's, when Lana was written out of ***LOIS LANE*** by being sent to Europe as a foreign correspondent. Unfortunately, it was revived by Marty Pasko shortly after he brought Lana back as Clark Kent's co-anchor on the 6 o'clock news (in ***SUPERMAN*** #317, Nov. '77) However, this time Superman finally did make a choice between the two women, unequivocally rejecting Lana by telling her, "I may never find a way to share this crazy life of mine with a woman — but if I ever do...it's going to be with Lois!" (***SUPERMAN*** #334, April '79, p.17).

But in many earlier, more traditional stories, the Man of Steel's fickleness does not confine itself to a mere insistence on having his cake and eating it too in his tantalizing encouragement of both Lois and Lana. In at least six stories, Superman expresses the intention of actually marrying some new woman he has just met, usually without even thinking of how unfair this is to longtime almost-fiancee Lois. The Man of Steel also comes close to proposing to a new female acquaintance on at least three other occasions. In only one case, "The Superman-Wonder Woman Team," (***LL*** #93, July '69), does Superman decide at the last minute that he can't marry someone else because of his feelings for Lois Lane. Furthermore, Superman is rarely punished for his "infidelity" to Lois as she is for unfaithfulness to him. Far from discovering that his new flame is a criminal or a monster, Superman sometimes seems quite undisturbed, except in the most perfunctory way, by the inevitable tragic circumstances that end his latest romance.

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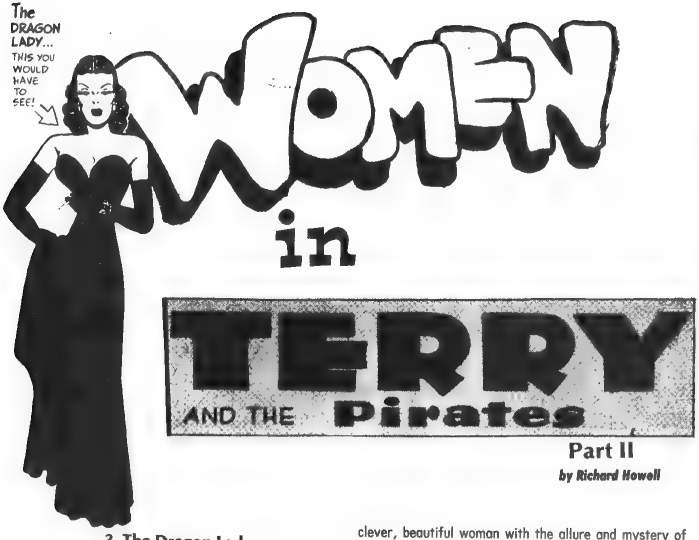


Part II

by Richard Howell

3. The Dragon Lady

Milton Caniff, writer/artist of ***TERRY AND THE PIRATES***, had already scored high with his readers due to his expert variations on classic female-character types, Normandie Drake and Burma. Where Normandie's and Pat Ryan's star-crossed romance (inspired by ***WUTHERING HEIGHTS***) attracted and held the soap-opera audience, Burma's very personality—the "wicked woman with a heart of gold"—was a magnet to the pulp-reader types of the day. Neither woman was without media precedent; it was Caniff's insightful presentation and embroidery of their ***type*** of character that made them both true-to-life yet also fascinatingly ***larger*** than it.

When Caniff introduced his third major female "leading player," he embellished a "stock type" that was older than either of the others: the Oriental temptress. Although several years would pass before La Choi San ("Mountain of Wealth") would grow past her stereotypical beginnings and both embody and transcend them, Caniff's creation of her hit an immediate chord with the readership. The new woman in ***TERRY AND THE PIRATES*** had the potential of combining the natural attraction of a clever, beautiful woman with the allure and mystery of the Orient upon which ***TERRY*** was founded.

The first time Pat Ryan and Terry Lee met the Dragon Lady was in a Sunday-strip-only adventure in 1935. She was a river pirate who was eventually captured by one of her rivals. In this initial encounter, the Dragon Lady evidenced a few qualities which were continually contradicted by her later appearances: First, she tended to speak in the stereotypical "bling white man to Dlagon Lady" Oriental dialect, and second, she was plain and rather flat-chested.

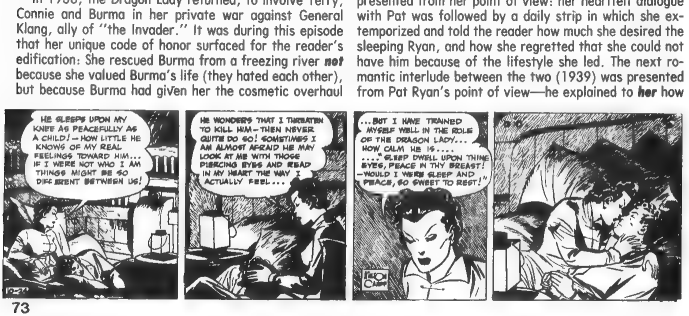
Both of these "character defects" were corrected by the second Dragon Lady adventure (in 1936), in which the D.L. kidnapped Pat Ryan and sold him into slavery to Papa Pyzon, the bulbous, woman-hating leader of an (all-male) outlaw settlement. It was during that episode that Pat's and the Dragon Lady's personal animosity became the most physically-expressed (he, bound, stabbed her in the hand with a pen. She tricked him into running through a false door off a pier). It was also during this adventure that the respect and admiration between them became the most evident: On their river trip into the interior, the Dragon Lady explained that her "oriental philosophy" prevented her from hating Ryan for his past interference.

"PAT RYAN AND I LANDED IN CHINA TO HUNT FOR A MINE... PAT HAD BEEN THERE BEFORE, BUT I WAS STRICTLY A DODO...
"...WE NEVER QUITE GOT OUR HANDS ON THE MINE, BUT WE DID RUN INTO A FABULOUS GAL WHO LED A BUNCH OF PIRATES OPERATING ALONG THE CHINA COAST...
"...THIS WOMAN WAS EURASIAN, BEAUTIFUL AND TOUGH AS A HASH-HEAVY TOP SERGEANT... SHE TREATED ME AS IF I WERE TRYING TO BORROW MONEY — BUT SHE TOOK ONE LOOK AT PAT RYAN AND THE AVERAGE MEAN TEMPERATURE FOR THE AREA ROSE SEVERAL DEGREES...

"There is no past!—Only the present and the hereafter!" They continued to bandy smart small-talk (while she played music for him) until he, still bound, fell asleep with his head in her lap. But for Pat's final waking comment ("Soothe me with a lullabye, baby!—For tomorrow, you'll probably cut my throat..."), the scene would hardly appear to be one between a hardened river pirate and her captive. It was the Dragon Lady herself who embellished that peaceful moment with a typical Caniff-style monologue after Pat had fallen asleep. In the course of the rest of the story, Pat was sold to Pyzon, escapes, finds Terry and Connie (who were looking for him), was recaptured (***with*** Terry and Connie, of course), and was raffled off as a bridegroom among the Dragon Lady's female army. When the Dragon Lady herself wins (through trickery), neither she nor Pat objected overmuch, although Pat arranged for Pyzon's Occidental camp doctor to be present at the ceremony, and it was revealed that the Dragon Lady was La Choi San, the woman who ruined the doctor's life and forced him to live the life of a derelict among miserables like himself. He then shot the Dragon Lady as Pat and company took advantage of the diversion and escaped.

In 1938, the Dragon Lady returned, to involve Terry, Connie and Burma in her private war against General Klang, ally of "the Invader." It was during this episode that her unique code of honor surfaced for the reader's edification: She rescued Burma from a freezing river ***not*** because she valued Burma's life (they hated each other), but because Burma had given her the cosmetic overhaul that had transformed her from a haggard convalescent back into the glamorous Dragon Lady. With that rescue, the D.L.'s "debt" to Burma was paid, and she was free to betray our heroes to Klang (in return for her safe getaway)—which she did. During this story, the Dragon Lady was depicted as a malevolent, utterly selfish woman with few-if-any interesting character quirks.

Caniff must have done some heavy thinking about that apperance of the Dragon Lady after her 1938 adventure, because when she next entered the lives of our protagonists, there was an important shift in the perspective of her presentation. In contrast to ***TERRY***'s other characters (mostly apparent in the women, like Burma and Normandie Drake) who displayed their sharpest, most empathy-inducing character fillips in Caniff's stage-y monologue scenes, the Dragon Lady was never again overheard talking to herself or telling her motives to the audience. This was important in that it was at that point that Caniff achieved the air of mystery around the Dragon Lady at which it seemed he had always been aiming. She became more aloof, more superior, and, (to play along with the descriptive cliche) more inscrutable. For instance, the scene in which she and Pat first kissed was presented from her point of view: her heartfelt dialogue with Pat was followed by a daily strip in which she extemporized and told the reader how much she desired the sleeping Ryan, and how she regretted that she could not have him because of the lifestyle she led. The next romantic interlude between the two (1939) was presented from Pat Ryan's point of view—he explained to ***her*** how


HE SLEEPS UPON MY KNEE AS PEACEFULLY AS A CHILD!—HOW LITTLE HE KNOWS OF MY REAL FEELINGS TOWARD HIM... IF IT WERE NOT WHO I AM THINGS MIGHT BE SO DIFFERENT BETWEEN US!
HE WONDERS THAT I HESITATED TO KILL HIM—THEN NEVER QUITTE SO SO! SOMETIMES I AM ALMOST AFRAID HE MAY LOOK AT ME WITH THOSE PIERCING EYES AND READ IN MY HEART THE WAY I ACTUALLY FEEL...
...BUT I HAVE TRAINED MYSELF WELL IN THE ROLE OF THE DRAGON LADY... A HOW CALM HE IS.... ...SLEEP DWELL UPON THINE EYES, PEACE IN THY BREAST! —WOULD I WERE SLEEP AND PEACE, SO SWEET TO REST!
HE DO...

"...THE DRAGON LADY WAS AS TRICKY AS A PAIR OF LOADED DICE ON PAYDAY UNTIL THE JAPS MOVED INTO CHINA — THEN SHE THREW ALL HER SKILL INTO THE WAR AND TURNED HER CUNNING ON THE NIPPOS..
"...AFTER DECEMBER 7, 1941, WE WERE SEPARATED AND I WENT INTO FLIGHT TRAINING, BUT I HEARD THAT PAT HAD JOINED THE NAVY AND THE DRAGON LADY WAS USING HER PIRATE'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHINA COAST TO HARASS THE JAPS AT MANY POINTS..."
"...SO, YOU GUYS CAN SEE THE LOGIC OF SENDING PAT RYAN, WITH HIS GRASP OF THE LOCAL SCENE, TO JOIN FORCES WITH THE DRAGON LADY AND HER PEOPLE!"
THAT I CAN, FRIEND TERRY. BUT THERE IS ONE DANGER IN ALL THIS!

much she wanted to kiss him. She neither supported nor contradicted his theory, but she *did* kiss him. The camp's resident romantic expert, April Kane, commented: "She's been kissed but *good*... and it *took*!" This is typical of the Dragon Lady's presentation after 1938—her motives were much talked *about*, but never confirmed or denied by her in a convincing manner. Occasionally she would "reveal" her plans to enemies or underlings, but the reader could never be sure if she were telling the truth. Whereas before, her motives were comparatively simple (greed, powerlust, Pat Ryan-lust) and all too clear, after 1938, she became a constant source of uncertainty, mystery, and intrigue—to the readers as well as to Pat and Terry.

FUNNY HOW WOMEN CAN BE REALISTIC ABOUT EVERYTHING BUT THEMSELVES! THEY KNOW THEY CAN RULE AN EMPIRE — BUT IN THE FINAL PAY-OFF THEY AREN'T SATISFIED UNLESS SOMEONE RULES THEM!
NO PERSON RULES THE DRAGON LADY!
SURE... THAT'S WHAT CLEOPATRA AND QUEEN ELIZABETH THOUGHT — BUT THEY BOTH REALIZED FINALLY THERE WAS NO USE KIDDING THEMSELVES — THAT A WOMAN CAN'T BE REALLY SATISFIED WITH ABSOLUTE POWER. IT'S HER DESTINY TO BE CONQUERED!
THEN WHAT MY ANALYTICAL ONE... DO YOU SUGGEST THE DRAGON LADY SHOULD DO ABOUT IT?
IT'S NOT MY PROBLEM! I'M JUST TELLING YOU... IF YOU DON'T RECOGNIZE THE WEAKNESS IN YOUR ARMOR, IT WILL BE YOUR DOWNFALL!
THE DRAGON LADY DOES RECOGNIZE HER WEAKNESS... IT IS IN ALLOWING YOUR PRESENCE HERE TO LINGER FOR A MOMENT! THE IRON MASK OF HER RESOLVE IS BROKEN! ...THAT PRESENCE MUST BE ELIMINATED!

To be sure, the elevation of the Dragon Lady to the Embodiment of Feminine Mystery and Power is not owed entirely to Caniff's more canny later presentation of the character. He also placed her in the epicenter of a long sequence involving a smuggling power-play, a siege on her mountain battlements, and (indirectly) the outbreak of World War II in comic strips. General Klang had fully gone over to the Japanese (still called "the Invader"), and was commissioned to destroy the Dragon Lady and her pirate-band-*cum*-fighters-for China's freedom. Meanwhile, the Dragon Lady was wounded escaping from a skirmish with her smuggling competitor, Baron DePlexus. Saved by Terry, she considered herself in his "debt," and several weeks passed in which she repayed him (while recovering) by teaching him to dance so he could take April Kane to some fancy-dress ball. After April decided to instead accompany young Deeth Crispin III, Terry escorted the Dragon Lady. He was unaware that DePlexus was also invited, and that the D.L. planned to use Terry's invitation to get in and kill her old enemy.

(This musical-comedy-like beginning for a deadly serious adventure involving "realistic" characters is in many ways typical of Caniff's approach to both story presentation and characterization. With the D.L. already established as an amoral pirate and a proven major menace to the strip's heroes, Caniff must have figured that he could indulge in a little fun with his readers by putting her and Terry into a comedic situation and let the humor arise from the incongruity played through the adventurers.)

...AND HIS FEELS LIKE 'EM WORLD'S FIRZE DOPE, IT BOOT!
BUT WHY DO YOU NOT REQUIRE THE PLEASURE OF SOME OTHER PRETTY LADY'S COMPANY?
GEE — WHO WOULD I ASK? I DON'T KNOW ANY OTHER PRETTY GIRLS!
INDEED? THERE HAS BEEN PERSONS WHO LOOKED UPON THE DRAGON LADY AS NOT ALTOGETHER REPULSIVE
OH, GOLLY — I DON'T THINK ... YOU MEAN YOU WOULD GO...? I MEAN ... GEE ... WOULD APRIL BE JEALOUS?...DO YOU MEAN TO REALLY GO WITH ME?
BUT OF COURSE... EVEN THOUGH IT REQUIRED THE SUBTLETY OF THE ACKNEED TANK TO ELICIT AN INVITATION.

I NEVER THOUGHT YOU WOULD ENJOY SUCH A PARTY!
AH, YOUNG ONE... IT IS NOT EXACTLY A MATTER OF ENJOYMENT! THERE WILL BE SOMEONE AT THAT FUNCTION WHOM THE DRAGON LADY WISHES VERY MUCH TO SEE!

Things went wrong! DePlexus escaped, and Terry, April, and Deeth were kidnapped by the Dragon Lady. The young Anglos were thus inadvertently allied with her in her mountain hideaway when Klang began his attack on it. Pat, Connie, and Big Stoop also became involved, and at the story's end, ***another*** slice of the Dragon Lady's past returned to haunt her: Big Stoop remembered her! He had been **her** servant when he was a small boy, and it was **she** who ordered his tongue cut out. In her escape from the vengeful giant, she was captured by the Invader troops.

In 1940, Raven Sherman was gulled by Hu Shee into attempting to rescue the Dragon Lady from captivity. They were captured in the attempt and all imprisoned together, leading to some enlightening dialogues over Pat Ryan between the Dragon Lady and Raven. Even there, though, the D.L.'s contempt for the brassy and bossy Raven seemed to affect even her most seemingly-straightforward statements. One wondered if she weren't embellishing even her admissions of "feminine weakness" to establish her superiority over Raven.

Much later, in 1942, the Dragon Lady met her rival Normandie Drake when the American woman was running from a Japanese prison camp with her daughter and Pat Ryan. Caniff having by then grown too sophisticated and subtle to have the D.L. and some other admirer indulge in any cat-fights over Ryan, the artist instead offered the Dragon Lady the opportunity to analyze for the reader (and to critically comment upon) Pat's devotion to Normandie. After Pat recounts the sleeping Mrs. Drake's tale of woe, the Dragon Lady judges: "The Dragon Lady is more amused than impressed at that prosaic recital. It is most convenient for the handsome bachelor to carry the so-called 'torch' for the safely married woman... The footloose Ryan is still happily distant from the fireside and carpet slippers." Pat Ryan looked as if he never realized before how perceptive she really was.

(The Dragon Lady's oft-demonstrated intelligence, perspipacity, and capability are four (yes four) reasons why she remains practically unchallenged in the present-day scamble to manufacture powerful female archetypes. Also, as with all Caniff characters, he was always willing to run her through a gamut of circumstances and resultant emotions, judiciously reiterating her basic personality throughout. Her character foibles (quite different from any other character's) established a balance for her likewise-individualized admirable qualities, creating a fully rounded characterization which could likewise serve as a symbol. With the possible exceptions of Big Barda, Goodwin's Leia, and Englehart's women, no other female characters in comic books have managed to serve such arduous double-duty, falling either into the classifications of "wimp," or "wind-up liberation doll.")

YOU AND THE DRAGON LADY HAVE ODDLY OPPOSITE QUALITIES, PALE ONE! OUR MR. RYAN ONCE TOLD ME THAT MY ARMOR OF PRACTICALITY IS BROKEN AT TIMES BY AN UNDERLYING FEMININE INSTINCT! IT SEEMS YOUR FEMININITY WILL ALWAYS BE TEMPERED BY A STRAIN OF COLD BRASS! TO YOU RYAN IS AN ADVENTURE— BUT YOU WOULD NOT DEPEND UPON HIM! I WOULD TRUST HIM WITH MY LIFE, BUT I DARE NOT THINK OF HIM ROMANTICALLY... NOW YOU MAY LAUGH!
MILTON CANIFF

During the 1940's, the growing professional bond between Pat Ryan and the Dragon Lady came to overshadow their earlier romantic one. When the D.L.'s forces stumbled upon Pat in '42, she referred to him (out of his presence) as the person best suited to discharging her mili-

... COULD IT POSSIBLY BE THAT YOU'RE URGING ME TOWARD THIS DUDE FELLOW SO YOU MAY HAVE A CLEAR FIELD WITH PAT RYAN?
MY GOOD WOMAN, YOU FLATTER YOURSELF!... IF THE DRAGON LADY CHOOSES TO TAKE A MAN FROM YOU — YOU WILL NEVER HEAR THE BELL AT THE END OF THE FIRST ROUND!

tary plans successfully—and most suited to be her second-in-command. In 1944, when the pair returned again, even though Pat was an officer in the U.S. Navy, he was also unofficially a member of the D.L.'s guerilla band. The Dragon Lady agreed to aid the U.S. military in their invasion plans (in return for the guaranteed safety of her forces), but she insisted that the operation be under the control of Commander Ryan. Indeed, Pat was the only man who had a sure method of contacting her (prearranged, of course).

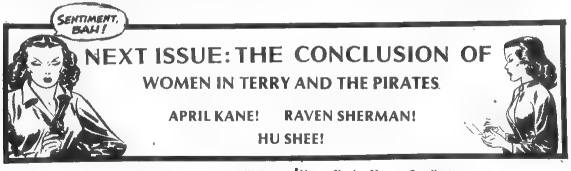
Unfortunately, it proved impossible to teach an old Dragon new tricks, as, as the story progressed it became evident that the D.L.'s forces were taping their American radio-beacon signals so they could betray their allies at the most convenient (and profitable) juncture. As the Dragon Lady then claimed to Pat that the recordings were only for insurance that the Americans would live up to their end of the deal (and then accused Ryan of duplicity in that he ***checked*** and ***discovered*** that she was spying on them), it is unlikely that readers will ever agree on what she really ***was*** planning. When her first plot was undermined, though, she had Hu Shee kidnap Terry (who was by then a fighter pilot) so the D.L. could use Pat and Terry's friendship bond as a lever against the Americans, but that gambit, too, failed, when the Japanese overran the territory in which Terry was imprisoned,'and Pat had to give him up for lost.

The Dragon Lady reappeared in Terry's life after the war (1946) when she was engaged in re-establishing her smuggling empire—and again fighting Baron DePlexus. She arranged for Terry to be employed by Chopstick Joe's seedy Air Cathay flight service, and then got compromising pictures of herself and Terry with which to blackmail him into playing along with flying her contraband shipments. This scheme, too, hit a snag when her henchman Slits became insanely jealous of his "master" and Terry and betrayed them both to DePlexus.

If any continuing blindness in the Dragon Lady was responsible for her plans' deviance, it was her refusal to admit the emotional bases of human behavior—in herself and in others. She so dismissed Slits' possessiveness and (correct?) appraisal of her regard for Terry, that she failed to consider to which paths revenge might lead him. ("You are wrong, Slits, but go on—your idle chatter amuses the Dragon Lady!") Her selfish conduct throughout her life "rewarded" her with a near-fatal shooting at the hands of Pyzon's doctor, ***and*** having a mute Chinese giant on her trail. While she realized this disallowance in her for the expression of emotions, and her ***de facto*** extension of that omission to other (viz. the D.L.'s chat with Raven), she could never conquer it in herself: her need for control of a situation was too great, even if the basis for her control was flawed.

Thus so was she, as were Caniff's other two classic females. In his characterizations of Normandie, Burma, and the Dragon Lady, Caniff evidenced such identifiable and consistent foibles as to not only convince the reader that those characters could be ***real***, but that the reader could and should empathize with them. Normandie Drake's life was ruined because she hadn't the will to prevent it from happening. Burma's insecurities and imagined inferiority precluded her from ever having had a satisfactory sustained relationship with anyone, man or woman, and the Dragon Lady's need for control presupposed the willful self-restriction of those feelings which could yield the full expression of her womanhood and humanity. One can nearly imagine Caniff writing ***TERRY***, with his Greek tragedies and Shakespeare off to one side, choosing a "tragic flaw" for each of his leading ladies—thus ensuring not only that they would lead troubled, restless lives, but also that they would continue to be a source of intrigue and empathy to his readers as well. ●

MAKE ME BEAUTIFUL WITH YOUR MAGIC HANDS! I MUST RADIATE ALL THE MAGIC OF THE ORIENT THIS NIGHT! THEY DO NOT CALL ME "DRAGON LADY" WITHOUT GOOD CAUSE!



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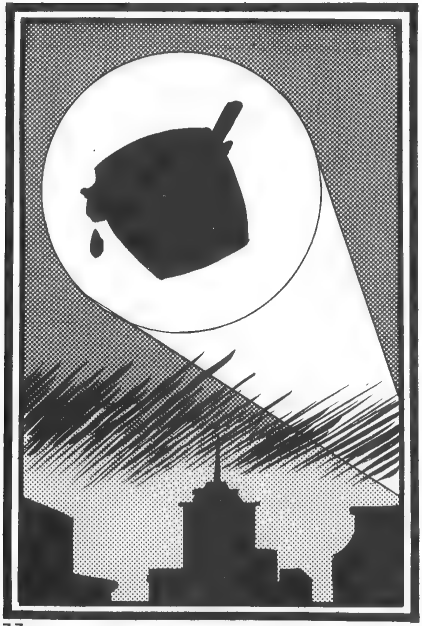
Guilty Fantasies

by Peter B. Gillis



"Sir, you've got to help me! It's my one last desperate chance—unnh!"

He doubled over as he collided with my table, spilling tea all over me. He was neatly dressed, but had an hysterical air about him.

"What's the matter?" I had been sitting in the campus coffeehouse for a while, and the tea was only lukewarm.

"Please! They're going to cancel my book, and—No! No! The pain! The pain!!"

"Calm down, you didn't hit it that hard."

"You don't understand! They're going to cancel my book!"

"Cancel your book? Are you a writer? My initial nervousness went away: I could understand his being upset in that case.

But the man shook his head. "I know you'll think I'm mad, utterly mad, but—my name is Kirk Frazier, tough freelance troubleshooter for a multinational engineering firm. But, in reality, I am—" and he bent toward me, and said in a whisper, "—Potato Salad Man!"

Uh-huh.

"Do you deliver?"

He forgot his secrecy, and said in a loud voice, "What kind of name is the Silver Surfer? Scott Free? Matter-Eater Lad?"

Uh-oh.

"And, uh, what are your powers?"

"There's no time for that now! I can only get away for a few moments! Listen—for a a while, Potato Salad Man was cosmic! I mean really good! Exciting, emotionally moving—depth! scope! Then, it began to happen. I started doing the same thing over and over again. I stopped growing as a person, and inwardly I began to worry. Even my sense of humor started getting worse! And lately, all the signs have been there! Everywhere I turn, I'm meeting other superheroes—guest stars! I never used to need 'em!—and they've even killed off my girlfriend and given me this stupid troubleshooting job! They're desperate, I tell you! And soon—boom!—cancellation!"

"They?" I said to myself that if he starts to talk about the Saucer People or the Illuminati, I was leaving, but he ignored my question.

"And I didn't even mourn my girlfriend! Oh sure, I was morose for a while, and I even stood by her gravestone on a windy night with a bunch of flowers in my hand, stony-faced. But I'm beginning to forget her, and I'm already becoming attached to another girl! Sure, Carol was dull, but that was no way to treat her! Under a falling wall! Jeez!"

It was all beginning to make a bizarre kind of sense.

"Couldn't this all be just bad writing?" I asked.

"No, no, no! I know the signs! And—the pain! It's returning!"

He jumped out of the chair, knocked over a girl coming in the door, and had vanished by the time I got out of the shop. I returned to my table and noticed that there were two hand-shaped stains on the table-cloth. I touched them, sniffed.

What sort of man sweated mayonnaise?

★ ★ ★

I had read enough stories where a distraught man tries to convince someone that his crazy story is true, where the other person doesn't believe him, and, of course, the story *is* true: I had therefore vowed to take all such occurrences seriously. (This once embroiled me in walking at midnight through Brewster, New York carrying a watermelon, but that's another story.)

There was no Kirk Frazier in the phone book, and no one working for any of the engineering firms I contacted. I haunted that coffeeshop, but to no avail. Then one day while reading a Philip K. Dick novel, I noticed with a start that it was dedicated to Kirk Frazier! I dropped the book in surprise, and from out of the leaves came a hit of blotter acid. It figured: the last time I read that book was in the late 60's. Seized with sudden inspiration, I ingested the insidious hallucinogen.

I picked up the phone book, which tried to wriggle out of my hands, and checked: sure enough, there was Kirk Frazier's address. I left my place.

When Kirk answered the door, he looked even neater than he had been before. He was wearing the same suit. At home?

"You! It—it can't be you!" he said. "Listen, can I sit down? There was this giant mutant fat lady on the bus—" I started to trail off into images.

"I'm glad you came! Now that contact has been established by **you**, we can meet more easily!"

"Great! How's the cancellation coming?"

A strange, flat look came over his face. "oh fine! I don't worry about it any more! I've started a new life and I've overcome all my old problems!"

He was sinking fast. I hit him with a book of Proust I seemed to find in my hand. That's when he broke.

"It's been a nightmare!" he cried. "I've been dreading cancellation, but what I'm going through now is even worse! It's like I'm in a little box: the only things that happen to me are things that happened before! And while there are changes, I find myself in different places, doing the same things!"

"That's terrible," I commiserated. I now noticed his hair was blue, and immediately distrusted my acid-soaked eyes.

"And you know the worst part? It's that half my memory is gone! I can remember the villains I fought, the people I met, all of that, but I can't remember how it ***felt***! I can't take stock of my life! Everything's disjointed: it's as though I'm not a person, just a chain of events!"

"Do you want cancellation now?" I asked softly.

"Yes; No; I don't know! I don't want to ***die***!"

"There's life after cancellation," I said,and it sounded so profound that I forgot where I was for a moment.

"But how much of me will be left? The Body? The costume? Maybe only the name? How much of my SOUL will there be?"

"Does a fictional character have a soul?' All of a sudden everything was becoming very clear. "Isn't he just a piece of entertainment?"

"NO! I'M A PERSON! I SHOULD BE A WHOLE PERSON! HOW CAN YOU BE ENTERTAINED BY A FIGURE WITHOUT A SOUL??"

"Calm down—"

"HOW CAN YOU READ ABOUT SOMEONE WHOSE ***MIND*** IS DIFFERENT EVERY TIME AN EDITOR CHANGES ***HIS*** MIND?"

"The average reader's age is—"

"POTATO SALAD MAN IS NOT A HUMAN BEING ANYMORE!"

"Commercial stories should be self-contained—"

Kirk had ripped off his suit, to reveal a yellow and white costume, but he was beginning—this may have been the LSD—to lose his third dimension and to fade.

"EVERYBODY OUT THERE! POTATO SALAD MAN IS DYING! EVERYBODY WHO BELIEVES IN CONTINUITY, CLAP YOUR HANDS TOGETHER! LOUDER! LOUDER! louder...."

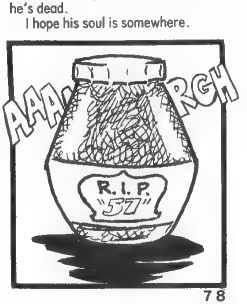
And he had completely faded away. I stood there, in the barren apartment. I felt like a slimeball, because a thought popped into my head, "Potato Salad Man! What a dumb concept! He deserved to die." He was just mindless entertainment, right? Comic books are just entertainment, right?

I got very hungry and went to the refrigerator. The whole thing was packed with jars, all the same. I read the labels. They all said "MAGIC PICKLE RELISH." I felt like laughing and crying at the same time.

Kirk hadn't said anything about the mind; just the soul.

PS: A few days later I found out(and that's another story) that Potato Salad Man had joined the Delifenders, with a new costume, new powers and a whole new personality. By all indications, he wasn't stupid anymore: (I think they're even calling him ***The*** Potato-saladman now) but I do believe that he's dead.

I hope his soul is somewhere.



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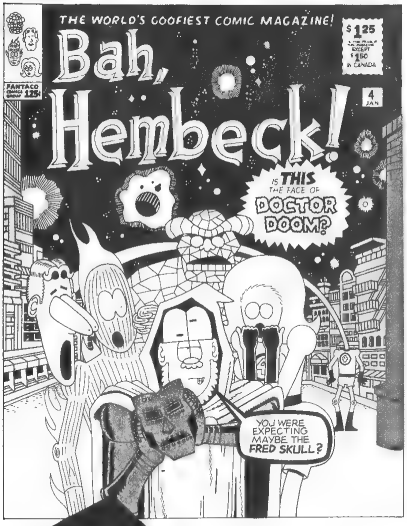
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End NOTES

by Peter Sanderson

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Hollybrook Graphics is currently making available two portfolios by Will Eisner: ***THE SPIRIT PORTFOLIO*** and ***CITY***, which is subtitled ***"A Narrative Portfolio."*** Both of them fit this description. These are graphic narratives of an unusual kind. Each drawing in ***THE SPIRIT PORTFOLIO*** may represent a moment from a different adventure of the Spirit than the others, and there are no continuing characters in ***CITY***. The links between the drawings in each portfolio are thematic, and one's understanding of those themes develops as he turns from one drawing to another, in the order in which they have been arranged.

The first picture in ***THE SPIRIT PORTFOLIO, "The Hideaway,"*** finds the Spirit emerging from his home, which shines with an inviting bright yellow light, into a world of death. The home lies within the Colt mausoleum, which in turn lies within a cemetary that hardly inspires thoughts of death as eternal rest. The cemetery fence is bent and broken; a grotesque dead tree stands in the foreground. Another tree, nearly devoid of leaves but with a trunk covered with what look like wrinkles, bears what appears to be a face wearing an anguished expression. Its roots, resembling legs with clawed feet, grip boulders rather than sinking into fertile soil. The cemetery is a portrait of sterility, ugliness, and misery. Matters are presumably no better in the Spirit's destination, the city, which looks eerily spectral in the distance. The Spirit himself looks determinedly and expectantly at his name on the cemetery entrance, as if reaffirming himself in the role he has chosen.

In ***"The Scene of the Crime"*** the Spirit impassively surveys the bodies of men, apparently dead, stretched on the floor before him. There is no hint of the Spirit's jollier moods from the old stories in this portfolio: this Spirit finds himself in a world of unrelieved grimness, and he is obviously angered by it. The Spirit does look unpleasantly surprised when he climbs out of a brightly lit yellow opening (reminiscent of the mausoleum) to confront ***"The Women,"*** P'gell and other sultry femme fatales, waiting for him in the darkness, their faces in shadow. The Spirit seems to expect trouble from them: perhaps they are the menaces he must confront?

"The Duel" takes place upon an immensely high tower, surrounded by bright yellow light from an enormous, blazing white sun. The Spirit, as befits his role as hero, is thus associated with the sun and its light; he belongs on a tower high above lesser men. But it is a struggle to achieve this position: the Spirit, intense-looking, his clothes torn, presumably affected by the sun's awful heat, punches a criminal wielding both a knife and gun, forcing him to topple from the tower back to his rightful place among the other criminals far below. The struggle is not without its reversals, and the Spirit finds himself at bay in "Dead End," still looking powerful, but trapped on a pier not far above a trash-filled river, confronted by criminal foes. The surrounding rain and gloom makes it seem as if the universe itself was the Spirit's opponent.

With ***"The Convention"*** the Spirit enacts both the mythic hero's ritual death and descent into hell. The Spirit, tied up, inert, seemingly dead, hangs over a rail high above a congregation of grotesque criminals, who busy themselves with his mask, gloves and hat, all symbols of his costumed identity. The criminals are, it seems, dividing his garments: the Crucifixion imagery should be obvious. Off to the side P'gell gazes upward at the Spirit, exhaling smoke rings: as usual in the portfolio, it is impossible to be certain what is going through her mind, but it is intriguing to speculate about it.

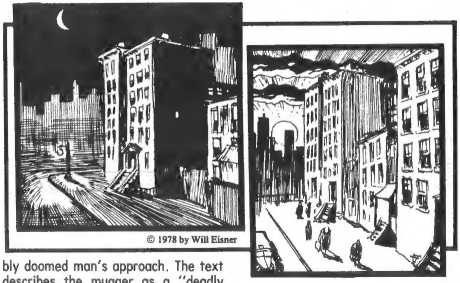
In ***"The Rescue"*** the Spirit goes through the mythic hero's resurrection. P'gell, with an oddly fanatical stare in her eyes, and (apparently) Ellen Dolan (dressed surprisingly less conservatively than usual) are paying off a particularly cadaverous-looking Mr. Carrion, who seems more than ever like a Dickensian personification of death. As two more grotesques set the Spirit free from his chains, he grimaces with rage at the concerned but somewhat sleazy woman hovering near him. Was I returned to life, the Spirit seems to think, for ***this?*** For more of a life filled with dangerous violence and eroticism? Indeed he was, and this time the Spirit does not fall victim to defeat. In ***"The Chase"*** the Spirit hurtles through a window down towards the water in pursuit of his prey. The Spirit is fearless, but the criminals'

faces are contorted with overwhelming fear. The next drawing has a massive figure of the Spirit standing frimly triumphant, holding lifeless-seeming criminals. He has not eliminated evil: P'gell watches sinisterly from the background, the Octopus's hand reaches unglimpsed from the water below (Is he trying to escape or about to attack?) and the sky above remains black, cloudy and threatening. But the figure of the Spirit dominates it all: for this moment at least, he is the indisputable victor.

With the final plate, ***"The City,"*** the cycle continues: the Spirit is again pursuing criminals against that ominous sky as the ever-present P'gell watches, thinking her mysterious thoughts. The city is full of deteriorating buildings, puddles, old crates and scraps of paper, but within this depressingly ugly world the Spirit races on, providing an image of heroism and hope.

But what does one do in the real world, where there are no Spirits? This is the subject of Eisner's later portfolio, ***CITY,*** which presents us with one of its central images on its very cover: a beaten up old trash can, filled to capacity with refuse. The trash can sums up all of the gross imperfections of the world and of existence.

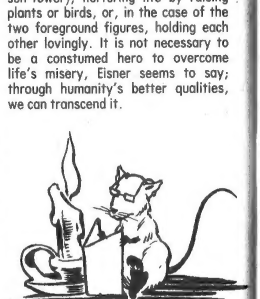
Eisner's technique in this portfolio is to pair the large tableaux of urban life with small drawings of men and animals of prehistoric times, and to use brief poems to comment upon both. The first section, ***"Predators,"*** is more specifically about scavengers, like the vultures in the small drawings (or vulture-owning Mr. Carrion in ***"The Rescue"***). Like the first ***SPIRIT*** plate, this first tableau presents a world of decay. A derelict lies amidst an incredible wasteland of junk while thieves, looking small in size compared to him, move stealthily towards him: a derelict Gulliver at the mercy of diabolical Lilliputians. But it is not merely those already lost in degradation who become victims of the world's evil. In ***"The Mugger"*** a man ascends a staircase, unable to see the junk lying on both sides along the top, or the patient, confident mugger waiting amidst the refuse. A small dog also waits at the top, mornfully watching the possibly doomed man's approach. The text describes the mugger as a "deadly dancer" with "dead eyes" as if he were a living dead man, a zombie, stalking those who are truly alive.



"The City" ranges the older, smaller buildings alongside the tall modern ones, but it should be noticed that all these buildings nearly succeed in blotting out the sky. To be a city dweller, the text states, is to suffer from a kind of claustrophobia. It is "no more to run free." "imprisoned by its plenty," its dwellers no longer seek for what life could be, but settle for what it is, misery and all. In the foreground walks a man in rumpled clothes, his shoulders slouched, his head bent and drowned in shadow: he is a portrait of alienation.

Then comes ***"The Spark,"*** the birth of compassion in the human soul. A blind man smiles as another man starts to help him across the street. The blind man cannot see the thugs to one side, or the ominous figures on the opposite side of the street. He cannot see how disreputable this section of town looks. But his helper looks at it all warily; we can see he recognizes the danger. Yet he is going to help the blind man nevertheless. This is not heroism of the Spirit's sort, but it is heroism nonetheless. ***"Family"*** pictures a tenement building, and while some people are quarrelling and some look glum, many others seem peaceful, friendly, and even happy. In the foreground stand a man and woman, neither drawn to look at all glamorous, who are apparently romantically involved. Love is beginning to arise from the nourishing environment of a true community of people.

Finally, from "out of the icy prison of winter," writes Eisner, comes the "plenty, warmth, food, fecund hope" and "the high of love" represented by the final tableau, "Life." Life is a cycle, Eisner notes, as he notes by paralleling the modern urban events with prehistoric ones, and hence misery and joy will continually alternate. But "for another moment in the endless cycle of the seasons" there is the happiness on display in this picture. The paper-strewn streets are far below; instead the tableau focuses on people atop their buildings, sunning themselves (reminding us of the Spirit on his high sun-tower), nurturing life by raising plants or birds, or, in the case of the two foreground figures, holding each other lovingly. It is not necessary to be a constumed hero to overcome life's misery, Eisner seems to say; through humanity's better qualities, we can transcend it.



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I BETTER! IT'S MY ORIGIN TOO!!
AH DON'T CARE WHAT THEY SAY-- AH'M A-TAKIN' 'EM IN!!
THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK, MORTAL!
ANTED!
DEAD!
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